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Learning, consumption and work in higher
education: An exploratory study of changing
student experiences

Jakov Jandrić



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Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Jakov Jandrić

Abstract

This thesis explores the implications of the changes in the political and social conceptions of higher education and the resulting crisis of higher education in the UK. The specific focus is placed on business schools as institutions operating in increasingly competitive management education markets, and on postgraduate students as key stakeholders that are largely neglected in academic and public discussions. It explores how the emerging characteristics of the management education, such as the reliance on specialised rankings and corporate-inspired business school designs, influence student perceptions of the purposes of education and their experiences of their chosen the programmes of study. In doing so, the thesis draws from theoretical discussions on mechanisms for mediation of market values and principles to students. Specifically, the thesis focuses on commodification of education through commensuration and standardisation embedded in specialised media rankings, and the representation of market values through the features of business school space. A qualitative exploratory study was conducted over a period of one academic year with 61 students enrolled on a postgraduate taught (MSc) programme in Management at a reputable UK business school. Data was collected on student behaviours, activities, opinions and views, as well as on their relationship with their social and organisational surroundings. Student views and perceptions were gathered through observations, informal conversations and 20 in-depth interviews from the chosen programme. Additional interviews with 12 postgraduate students from other schools informed the discussion by providing insights into the similarities and differences between student perceptions and experiences in different institutional settings. Data collection was supplemented with secondary data, including policy documents and visual data. Contrary to the prescriptive,

linear and goal-oriented perspective on students dominating contemporary academic and policy discourses, findings suggest that students experience education as a messy and a transformative process, with ambiguous and uncertain outcomes. The thesis contributes to academic debates on the social roles and functions of specialised rankings by providing insights into the nature of the student consumption of rankings, and their influence on student experiences. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature on the implicit and informal elements of business school settings by recognising space as an active and constitutive part of student experience. The thesis challenges the prevalent institutional and political reduction of students to consumers of education, and instead implies that student experience should be treated as a complex, multi-layered and, above all, fluid process. In doing so, the thesis offers a novel approach towards a more comprehensive understanding of the roles and purposes of higher education in contemporary society.

Lay Summary

Against a backdrop of significant political, economic and global changes, the social roles and purposes of Higher Education in the UK have been called into question. Specifically, concerns have been raised with regards to the implications of the market-based approach to higher education, and the view of students as consumers of educational products. Somewhat surprisingly, one of the key stakeholders, students, have been underrepresented in academic and public discussions. By examining the educational process from a viewpoint of students, the study explores two key aspects of student experience of management education: how they perceive, understand and use specialised rankings; and the ways in which the physical space of education shapes their experience and attitudes towards learning.

The findings of the study challenge the current positioning of students as consumers, which dominates the recent UK higher education public discourse. Instead, a more subtle and nuanced approach is offered, one that views students as active participants in the educational process; as individuals, whose educational experiences are not only complex and fluid, but also susceptible to the changing conceptions of higher education. Three dominant experiences are identified – learning, consumption and work – all resulting from consumerist values represented and practiced through the institutional engagement with market devices, and embedded in the features of business schools' spaces. The proposed approach encourages the treatment of higher education in public policy as both transitional and transformative and, therefore, beneficial both to individuals and society. Accordingly, higher education institutions are invited to critically examine the appropriateness of the market-based approach to higher education, and its implications on students and their educational experiences.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The pace and scale of change have produced a sense of disorientation, an uneasy feeling that, as a society, we may be losing our once-familiar understanding of the nature and role of universities yet we have not so far replaced it with anything better.

(Collini, 2017: 2)

Over the past 30 years, the exploration of commercialisation and marketisation pressures in higher education has attracted much attention in academic and public debates (e.g. Bok, 2003; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007; Collini, 2012). In the UK, the recent discussions on the implications of Brexit on the higher education system (e.g. Burns, 2016) have further highlighted a fundamental challenge society is facing with regards to the roles and the purposes of contemporary higher education. Drawing from Collini's (2017: 4) argument that any discussion on the ways forward for the universities requires us to "...be able to articulate an understanding of what universities are *for* that is adequate for our time...", this thesis argues that such discussion requires detailed interrogation of the social, political and institutional assumptions about the student expectations and, consequently, the nature of their educational experiences.

This thesis builds on the growing literature on new approaches to managing higher education sector and the universities as institutions central to its provision (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007; Bok, 2003; Le Grand, 2009). The pre-requirements of this change, such as commodification of education and standardisation of institutional practices and educational processes,

increasingly dominate the contemporary higher education environments. As a result, the starting point for the discussion is a fundamental shift in the political conception of higher education in the UK over the past decades, exemplified in the following quotes:

While emphasising that there is no betrayal of values when institutions of higher education teach what will be of some practical use, we must postulate that what is taught should be taught in such a way as to promote the general powers of the mind. The aim should be to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women. (Robbins Report, 1963: 6)

Our universities have a paramount place in an economy driven by knowledge and ideas. They generate the know-how and skills that fuel our growth and provide the basis for our nation's intellectual and cultural success. [...] Competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game, offering consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better quality products and services at lower cost. Higher education is no exception. (Johnson Report, 2016: 7)

The significant difference in the rhetoric in two documents could be viewed as a paradigmatic shift in the conception of the purposes of higher education, from the focus on production and dissemination of knowledge for its own sake, to the purposeful focus on activities aimed at serving the society (Gibbons, 1998). While Robbins (1963) kept the purposes of higher education vague and open to interpretation, more recent documents such as the Browne Report (2010) and the Johnson Report (2016), offer a very specific purpose of higher education, namely customer orientation and provision of value-for-money excellence in teaching and research. On the other hand, if the view of higher education as an acutely ideological political process characterised by the fundamentally transformative effect on individuals and societies (Dewey, 2004; Freire, 2005) is followed, concerns are raised that such repurposing of higher education raises could potentially lead to the oversimplification of its

role in the society. Such simplification is represented in the reduction of higher education to a dichotomy between its self-serving past, and its seemingly purposeful present (Gibbons, 1998), which remains a key argument for the marketization of the sector, as well as the key source of the growing critique of its current values and practices.

For Robbins (1963), higher education is essential for the social progress. The Report points to the intricate relationship between educated individuals and the society, and suggests that social progress requires educational experience that goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and expertise. From this perspective, education represents a medium in which social reform is formed and takes place (Dewey, 2004), and which requires the cultivation of “general powers of the mind” (Robbins, 1963: 6). In the UK, the years following the Robbins Report (1963) were characterised by a significant growth in the number of higher education institutions (Collini, 2012), educating a fast growing and increasingly diverse student population. While the challenges, brought by the rise in student numbers and the expansion of institutions in the sector, required at times substantial changes in the ways how higher education is managed (Lorenz, 2012), key expectations from higher education as a vital element of societal progress remained largely unchanged (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007).

The rise of neoliberal agenda in the UK public policy in the 1980s (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007; Ball, 2012; Parker, 2014), marked the point in which these expectations began to change. In centre of these changes was the ‘demystification’ of higher education, or a transformation of the perception of higher education from a public to a commodified service. Furthermore, its purposes and practices were to be simplified and transformed into a commodified portfolio of services, each characterised by clearly defined and

measurable aims, and by the provision of tangible and value-for-money outcomes to the individuals engaged in educational processes (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011). Following these changes, the sector experienced a series of significant transformations aimed at accommodating to market principles or, more precisely, to the choice-and-competition principles of public services delivery (Le Grand, 2009).

Some of the transformations more notably explored in the academic literature include the introduction of new public management practices in higher education (Hood, 1995; Tolofari, 2005), including the focus on the auditability and transparency of its practices (Power, 1999; Strathern, 2000), and the reconceptualization of its governance (Shore, 2008; Hedmo & Wedlin, 2006; Frost, Hattke & Reihlen, 2016). Following the latest focus of policy makers on assuring the provision of excellence in teaching and on consumer protection (see Johnson, 2016), it is reasonable to suggest that, while many of these processes are still ongoing¹, the sector reached a point in which market competition is seen as the only reasonable mode of managing universities as its key providers.

Drawing from the above discussion, this thesis explores the changing perspectives on the roles and the purposes of higher education by focusing more specifically on management education. Such context is chosen due to its active role in the changes and transformations occurring within the higher education sector (Hopwood, 2008; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016), particularly with regards to new modes of standardisation, accountability, legitimacy and image management. Management education is suitable for such exploration

¹ Currently, key debates on higher education revolve around the introduction of private higher education providers in the UK market, and the introduction of the possibility that universities who fail in the market competition would be subject to discontinuing their activities. Both topics are favoured by the current UK government (Johnson, 2016).

due to its two characteristics: (1) the increasing reliance on specialised rankings and accreditations as means for building legitimacy and reputation (Hazelkorn, 2011; Wedlin, 2006; Espeland & Sauder, 2007), and (2) the increasing reliance on consumer-oriented image and spatial designs (Alvesson, 2013; Policano, 2005) for attracting students. Furthermore, the strong growth in numbers of business and management students paying premium tuition fees resulted in the changing conception of the business school from its historically marginalised position within the university (Khurana, 2007), into their central place as a potential model of education delivery for the entire higher education sector (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016).

1.1. Empirical focus of the study

In line with the broad aim of the study to explore the students and their experiences in the context of the changing roles and purposes of higher education, the focus of the empirical investigation is placed on postgraduate taught students. While the focus on undergraduate students could also be a viable approach to such study, several important reasons make such investigation problematic. First, the status of undergraduate students significantly varies between different countries in the UK, particularly in terms of different tuition fees systems and opportunities for government funding.

After being introduced in 1998 (Dearing, 1997), tuition fees in the UK rose over time from £1,000 to current £9,000 cap for undergraduate students. Most undergraduate students fund their education through a government grant system that issues financial grants to all eligible undergraduate students wishing to pursue higher education, placing them in a contractual obligation to pay back their student debts when their earnings exceed £21,000 per annum (Gov.uk, 2017). The situation is, however, slightly different in Scotland, where

the tuition fees for Scottish students pursuing undergraduate studies in Scotland range from £1,285 to £2,895 per annum depending on the pursued degree, and are paid by the Student Awards Agency (Student Awards Agency Scotland, 2017b). Apart from the differences in treatment of undergraduate students in different parts of the UK, the nature of the research objectives of this research required a rounded insight into students' educational process from its beginning to its end. Considering the three or four-year duration of undergraduate programmes in the UK, this was unfeasible to achieve over a period of the doctoral research, and remains an interesting potential for further research.

Following this, the focus was placed on postgraduate management students attending a one year postgraduate taught general management programme in a business school. Postgraduate education remains one of the largest segments of higher education in the UK, with around 425,000 postgraduate taught students enrolled on one of the 159 higher education institutions in 2015 (O'Prey, 2015). It is characterised by relatively stable enrolment numbers over the past five years, despite the tuition fees increases in the same period. Furthermore, postgraduate education remains a driver of UK's international reputation, with almost 40% of all postgraduate students coming from abroad (Universities UK, 2016). Additionally, postgraduate education is particularly popular within the business and management education sector: Universities UK (2016) report that the number of students awarded a postgraduate business and management degree (a large majority of which are postgraduate taught students) account for 47% of total business and management degrees awarded in 2015.

Postgraduate tuition fees are not regulated in the same way as undergraduate fees, and they range from £4,900 per year to over £30,000 for MBA

programmes, averaging at around £11,000 per year (UCAS, 2017), with averages significantly decreasing if MBA programmes are excluded. Here, business and management related postgraduate programmes tend to be among the most expensive ones in the UK. For example, the tuition fees for a one year MSc in Management programme offered by top business schools in the UK range from £9,800 for UK/EU students, and £17,800 for international students, to almost £30,000, and averaging at £15,577 for home students, and £22,033 for international students².

In contrast to the well-researched MBA programmes (Leavitt, 1991; Vaara & Day, 2011; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2013), MSc students and their expectations of, relationships with, and experiences in business schools remain underexplored in the academic debates. Their central place in contemporary business schools, and their importance for the financial and reputational performance of the institutions, makes them an interesting research context due to their simultaneous position in the centre of academic practices and on the periphery of the research interest. Accordingly, the academic discussions on practices in management education (e.g. Smith, 2007; Evans, Trevino & Weaver, 2006), its purposes (e.g. Starkey & Tempest, 2008; Gioia, 2002), as well as the social implications of higher education (Freire, 2005; McLaren, 2002; Giroux, 2002) are all led with little interest in students not only as the key participants in the educational processes, but also as active organisational members of their business schools.

To address this, the study investigates student accounts of their experiences with specialised rankings as devices for market maintenance, and the designs and characteristics of business schools' organisational spaces. Both contexts

² The calculations presented are based on an analysis conducted by the author. More information can be found in Appendix A.

are chosen due to their active role in the interplay between marketization, commodification and standardisation, and the institutional values and practices in business schools. Following this, the thesis aims to provide a novel perspective on the challenges and benefits for student experience that arise from the ongoing socio-political changes in higher education. Finally, by doing so, this thesis also contributes to the advancement of the organisational understanding of students, and the (un)intended implications that commercially driven institutional, social, material and spatial practices have on student experience and development. Such exploration also provides a basis for specific recommendations in the context of organisational perspectives on students, the specialised ranking mechanisms, and the socio-material practices within the business school spaces.

1.2. Outline of the thesis

This chapter is followed by a Literature review chapter in which key literature is explored in four sections. The first section explores the academic debates with regards to the changing higher education environment over the past decades. A specific interest is placed on the academic discussions on the nature of students and their experiences in market-based higher education characterised by increased consumerist perspectives on education. Next, the focus of the discussion is placed on management education and the academic debates surrounding its commodification and standardisation, as well as the commercialisation of institutional image and branding. The third section explores the phenomenon of specialised rankings, their role in creation and maintenance of management education market, and the features of their creation and use. The fourth section explores contemporary theorisations of organisational spaces as active elements of organisational life that act as a

medium for implicit exposure of students to the market values embedded in contemporary higher education. Following the overview of academic discussions, three research questions are proposed in the final section of this chapter.

After the Literature review chapter, the Methodology chapter is dedicated to outlining the characteristics of the qualitative empirical study conducted as a part of this doctoral research. First, the study is situated within the constructivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological traditions. Considering that the research design substantively relied on the insights from other ethnographic studies in organisational and educational studies, the next section provides an extensive discussion on the use and the suitability of ethnographic methods in this empirical context. Next, research strategy and design are discussed, including the description of the setting of the study and its key participants, as well as the description of the data collection process, and the researcher's reflections on the process. The chapter concludes with the outline of the data analysis process.

Chapter four represents the first of three chapters exploring the findings of the empirical study. It outlines the student accounts of their experiences in the business school, and explores different student perspectives on education. This chapter also sets the scene for the chapter five and chapter six, which provide much more focused accounts of student experiences. Chapter five explores how students use and understand rankings, as well as what purposes rankings have in the educational process, and in shaping student experiences. Chapter six starts with a descriptive account of the physical and design features of the business school, followed by the student experiences with business school spaces. Most notably, the chapter explores the importance of the design and use of business school space for student conceptualisation of

their experience, and its role in establishing power relations between different organisational members.

In line with the exploratory nature of the study, chapter five and chapter six both conclude with sections that provide an initial discussion and contextualisation of the findings within the relevant literatures. The final discussion of the findings is presented in chapter seven. Here, the discussion points made in each of the findings chapters are further discussed and theorised. Finally, the thesis concludes with chapter eight, in which key theoretical and practical contributions of the study are presented, along with the implications of the study for individual institutions and policy makers. The chapter also outlines the limitations of the study, as well as possible areas for future research. Finally, the chapter and the thesis end with the concluding remarks on the value of this study in a broader higher education context.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framing for the empirical study conducted as a part of this doctoral research. Considering the issues identified in the Introduction chapter, this chapter discusses the relevant academic debates considering the issues related to higher education in general, and management education in particular. The first section explores the discussions surrounding the sources, features and implications of ongoing marketization and commercialisation processes in higher education, with a specific emphasis on the resulting changes in the conceptions of students and their educational experiences. Next, the discussion focuses on management education as a sector at the forefront of these changes. Here, a specific focus is placed on commodification, standardisation and image management as key processes supporting the commercialisation of student experiences in the management education context.

In the light of these discussions, two characteristics of management education are recognised as highly relevant for shaping the student experience: (1) specialised media rankings as devices for market creation (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012) and maintenance (McKenzie, 2009), and as indicators of reputational information, and (2) the designs and socio-material features of organisational spaces in contemporary business schools. First, specialised rankings are discussed in the context of their emergence and proliferation over the past several decades. Next, features of specialised rankings are discussed, as well as their influences on business schools and their staff.

The next section explores the increasingly corporate features of business school social and material spaces, influenced by the emergence of the

customer-provider model of education, are placed in the context of recent theorisations of space as an active and formative element of organisational life. The chapter concludes with the formulation of the research questions.

2.1. Features of contemporary higher education in the UK

Key arguments and themes explored and discussed in the thesis are set against the backdrop of the fundamental changes in social and political environments surrounding higher education in the past 30 or so years (Bok, 2003; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007). In the UK, the social welfare state emerged after World War II, supported by the post-war discourse rooted in the collective national focus on survival and winning during the war (Le Grand, 2004). This sense of comradeship and the necessity of a collective action to build a better and fairer society was also present in post-war political views on the central role of higher education, most notably in the Robbins Report (1963).

Today regarded as one of the UK's most influential post-war higher education policy documents (Barr, 2014), the Robbins Report took a view of higher education as key to social progress. Specifically, the Report argued for the necessity for universities to produce educated individuals who are "not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women" (1963: 6), who are well equipped with independent and critical thinking (Willetts, 2013; Khurana, 2007) required for social development and progress. With such ideas requiring strong increases in student numbers and the diversity of social backgrounds, the recommendations of the Report instigated an era of the expansion of universities and the development of the UK as one of the most desirable places for higher education (Collini, 2012; Barr, 2014).

In the decades following the Robbins Report, universities held a specific place within the public sector, maintaining academic, strategic and operational autonomy while at the same time enjoying the benefits of public funding (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007). With the emergence of new universities, the number of students, who enjoyed tuition-free education and governmental financial support, also began to strongly rise (Barr, 2014). The increase in the number of students and universities, however, also led to significant financial and operational challenges for the sector. Universities were increasingly viewed as well protected, self-serving “quiet enclaves removed from the busy world” (Bok, 2003: 1), characterised by constantly increasing public expenditure in support of rising student numbers.

2.1.1. Recent changes in the university environment

With the economic instabilities at the end of 1970s and the rise of neoliberal political discourse (Dolby, Dimitriadis & Willis, 2004) under early Thatcher-Reagan era, the values and the purposes of higher education began their gradual transformation towards measurability, accountability and value-for-money (Power, 1999; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007) as dominant desirable features of higher education. Following Thatcher’s mantra “There is no alternative” (Sandlin & McLaren, 2009), choice-and-competition principles (Le Grand, 2009) of educational service delivery were gradually introduced into the sector over the next decades. These changes in the conceptions and treatment of higher education have led to the increased concerns about the potential uncertainty and vagueness regarding societal role of universities, as well as the nature of the education they provide (Collini, 2017).

In contrast to the increasing number of publications suggesting that the above changes in social and political conceptions and treatment of higher education have led to a 'serious crisis' of the sector (Peters, 1992; Anderson, 1993; Ball, 2004; Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2015), its current state seem to provide little evidence in support of such views. In the UK, the university sector grew rapidly in the wake of the transformation of polytechnics into universities in support of the growing numbers of international students wishing to study in the UK (Trow, 1992). Moreover, in recent years, universities attracted record numbers of students and external funding (Collini, 2017), placing them in an increasingly important position in contemporary society. Still, as Anderson (1993: viii) argues, "one now senses a certain uneasiness, a vague dissatisfaction. Something is not quite right". Collini (2012: 3) furthers this point by arguing that modern universities hold a paradoxical position:

Never before in human history have [universities] been so numerous or so important, yet never before have they suffered from such a disabling lack of confidence and loss of identity.

However, both the lack of confidence and the loss of identity are not surprising for institutions which, after decades of autonomy, recently experienced a significant push towards market dependency. With institutional image and reputation being created on the externally managed league tables, and confidence built through externally sourced accreditations, universities arguably lost some of the control over their strategies and practices (Khurana, 2007; Peters, 1992). The lack of autonomy felt in the aftermath of the increasing marketisation of university practices and values, however, does not seem to adequately reflect the fundamental dilemma facing universities. The question of the purposes of higher education should not by any means be considered a feature of recent decades, or a result of the recent changes in higher

education's social and political landscape. In contrast, the questions concerning what university education is for have been present in academic debates for much longer.

The outsiders want the students trained for their first job out of university, and the academics inside the system want the student educated for 50 years of self-fulfilment. The trouble is that the students want both. The ancient collision between each student's short-term and long-term goals, between 'training' and 'education', between 'vocational' and 'general', between honing the mind and nourishing the soul, divides the professional educators, divides the outside critics and supporters, and divides the students, too. (Cleveland, 1974: 4)

While Cleveland's articulation of different perspectives on the desired outcomes of higher education remains very much relevant to this day, reading it from the contemporary perspective necessarily requires the reflection on the concerns raised in the context of changing social and political perspectives on education. Firstly, the consumer-orientation outlook dominating the current policy discourse (Browne 2010; Johnson, 2016) pushes universities toward focusing on a more practical, vocational training considered as leading to better student employability. Driven by the political mantra that "competition generally raises quality" (Browne, 2010: 2), universities are increasingly compelled to "... persuade students that they should 'pay more' in order to 'get more'" (ibid: 4). Secondly, the political and institutional conceptions of the role and the position of students are being simplified, with students perceived as individuals who pursue higher education predominantly because of gaining access to more tangible outcomes of higher education, such as better opportunities for employment (Grineski, 2000; Tymon, 2013).

The current state of higher education, then, seems to be related not only to the ways universities cope within the changing socio-political environment, but also how they approach students and their education. Following this

argument, Anderson's (1993) feeling that something is not quite right is strongly related to the organisational inability to cope with the increasing incompatibility between the values and practices that enable a meaningful educational experience, and the market principles that guide their educational and organisational practices. If contemporary higher education is indeed challenged by the incompatibility between the educational and market-supported values, the focus of the academic discussion needs to be widened from the institutional responses (Wedlin, 2006; Corley & Gioia, 2000), and recognise students as central stakeholders who are currently placed at the centre of academic practices, but at the periphery of its interest.

2.1.2. The position of student in contemporary higher education

Arguably one of the most significant changes in higher education policy and practices occurred in the political, social and institutional conceptions of the role and the position of the student in higher education. While the academic interest in management education gradually increased over the years and in the light of the aforementioned socio-political changes, these discussions have largely neglected to take a more nuanced look at students and their experiences (Barnett, 2015).

Etymologically, the word student derives from the Latin verb 'studere', which means 'applying oneself to'. It is associated to the Latin word 'studium', which means 'painstaking application' (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). The term student, therefore, reflects not only the individual's full immersion into the studied matter, but also that such immersion necessarily requires meticulous and hard work. It is also important to note that the term reflects the individual activity, emphasising the process. Barnett (2007) suggests that being a student assumes

a complex and dynamic relationship between a student as an individual human being, and his or her educational setting. Following Freire's (2005) characterisation of higher education as a transformation of being, Barnett argues that being a student

is not so much a transition from a mode of being for one kind of life to a mode of being for another specific kind of life [...] Rather, the transformation is the taking on of a mode of being for uncertainty... (Barnett, 2007: 39)

Following this, the fundamental purpose of higher education lies not only in its depository function (Freire, 2005), or its role in changing the student prospects – financial, social, or any other, but in the enabling of the students' understanding of ambiguity and the complexity of life, and in developing their ability to adapt to uncertainty. Consequentially, the idea of the student as a being in a process of fundamental transformation necessarily requires the acceptance of the uncertainty of the outcomes of such transformational process.

The introduction of market principles in higher education, however, steers the UK higher education system in the opposite direction, towards increased commodification, standardisation and, more importantly, predictability of the education outcomes (Barnett, 2014), thus marginalising the purpose of higher education as a driver for the transformation for uncertainty (Barnett, 2007). Following the changes in the sector, the conception of students and their experiences has also been simplified, standardised and commodified over the past decades.

An excellent example is the introduction of tuition fees in the UK. In Robbins' (1963) view, it was important to keep higher education free and, therefore, available to all eligible and willing members of the society. He considered both

the extrinsic and the intrinsic outcomes of higher education as key factors in the social progress due to their potential to yield benefits for both the individuals and the society. With the introduction of the neoliberal discourse in higher education (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007), such perspective of students and their financial responsibility shifted towards a currently dominant view of students as primary beneficiaries of the commodified education and, thus, individually responsible for its funding. In other words, the nature of the student role and student experience under the market regime is no longer both transformative and transitional (Barnett, 2007), but is instead reduced to a merely transitional one.

The resulting tuition fees system, which was introduced in the UK in 1998 following the Dearing Report (1997), has instituted the initially small student contribution to their education, which significantly increased in the recent years (Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016). The introduction of tuition fees marks the point in which the financial burden of higher education was shifted from the state to individuals (Shattock, 2006). This shift seems symbolic, as all eligible students who enrol in higher education on the undergraduate and, more recently on postgraduate level, are entitled to a student loan. Also, the predictions for the current system propose that most of student loans will never be repaid (Tetlow, 2016), which suggests that the introduction of tuition fees has not resulted in significant reduction of public spending on education. The resulting shift towards students as fee-paying customers of higher education, and the resulting shift in the perception of education from a public good to a commercial commodity, has necessarily resulted with changes in the conceptualisation of students and their educational experience.

2.1.3. The student experience

The notion of student experience has been increasingly present in academic and policy discourse. Johnson's Report (2016), for instance, uses several terms that relate to students and their educational experience, namely learning experience, life-enriching experience, high quality experience, and academic experience in the context of value-for-money. The common denominator to all these viewpoints of student experience is their embeddedness in the student *post hoc* evaluation of their time spent studying, thus reducing it to "a one-size-fits-all definition [of] short term satisfaction as measured in instrumental and transactional terms" (Scott, 2014). A similar trend is followed in some segments of the academic literature, where the term often reflects the student assessments of quality and personal satisfaction with the educational process (Brookes, 2003; Douglas, McClelland & Davies, 2008), or the role of professional experience and experiential learning in fostering employability of students through job placements during their studies (Greenbank, Hepworth & Mercer, 2009; Baden, 2013). In these examples, the value of student experience is assessed at 'an end', or at the final point of the pre-programmed educational process, and based on pre-defined end goals. Student experience, like consumer experience, becomes a reflexive practice, in which the assumptions and intended outcomes are weighed compared to the initially desired ones.

In academic literature, student experience has been increasingly explored in the context of consumerism reflected in the curricular designs and pedagogical practices (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005), as well as in the institutional approach to students (Delucchi & Smith, 1997). Consumerist approach to education design and delivery is regarded an intrinsic element of marketisation of higher

education (Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2015). The organisational treatment of students as paying customers (Marshall, Fayombo & Marshall, 2015) redefines their relationship with the university (Barnett, 2007) and their teachers (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011). The formation of such relationship between the students and their institution yielded some positive changes in the sector, such as improved organisational responsiveness to students' needs, and increased accountability for ensuring high quality education (Halbesleben, Becker & Buckley, 2003).

At the same time, the customer-service provider relationship leads to increased organisational concern with customer satisfaction (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005) and attentiveness to student wishes (Delucchi & Smith, 1997). With the rise of institutional treatment of students as customers, student attitudes have also shifted towards a consumerist perspective, seeing education as a paid-for-commodity (Marshall, Fayombo & Marshall, 2015). The implications of these perspectives on education are reflected in the fundamentally narcissistic character of student satisfaction (Nixon, Scullion & Hearn, 2016), and the student disengagement from the elements of the educational process that are not considered explicitly related to individual economic benefits (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002). With institutions and students increasingly taking a consumerist outlook on education, the concerns are raised regarding the negative implications it might have on the educational process and pedagogy (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). Nevertheless, the consumerist attitudes, identified both in institutions and among students, indicate the emergence of consumer-related experiences in higher education.

Here, Barnett (2011) proposes a conceptual differentiation between students as consumers and students as customers. In his view, student-consumers are

characterised by their passivity in accepting the provided education. In this sense, Barnett echoes Freire's (2005) concerns about the power relations between the teachers as knowledge bearers and students as passive depositories of knowledge. Such approach, dubbed by Freire (2005: 72) as a 'banking concept of education', is seen as "a characteristic of the ideology of oppression [that] negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry". In other words, the passive acceptance of education diminishes the development of critical thinking and creativity in service of the individual transformation towards a being for uncertainty (Barnett, 2007). Instead, Barnett (2011) suggests that the introduction of tuition fees and other features of marketisation have given rise to student-customers as individuals with an active role in their educational process. First, students are actively participating in choosing their institutions, programmes and courses. They are also increasingly active in voicing their views, needs and wishes to universities and their teachers, influencing a potentially formative dialogue between students and teachers. At the same time, their increasing power as customers, reflected in various feedback they provide both within the institution, and through external market devices such as rankings, suggests their increasingly active role in development, design and delivery of education, potentially placing the educational processes in danger (Marshall, Fayombo & Marshall, 2015).

So far, the discussion reflected the key academic debates on the nature of student experience as an increasingly dominant feature of the higher education process, with consumerism as the increasingly important factor of influence. While building on these discussions, the exploration of student experience in this thesis requires taking a different approach, the one in line with the discussed features of the nature and role of students in higher

education (Freire, 2005; Barnett, 2007). Instead of viewing it as a post-hoc rationalisation, student experience is viewed as an emerging feature of students' exploration and discovery. Following this perspective, student experiences become the building block of the individual overall experience of their educational process. While this point suggests that education is fundamentally reflected in individual experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2009) of features such as learning and consumption (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005), it is important to clarify that not all experience is educative, and not all experience influences education in the same way and to the same effect (Dewey, 1997). Furthermore, it is critical to note that student experience does not exist in a vacuum, as it reflects the student's social, physical, political and cultural surroundings (ibid). This point becomes particularly important in the exploration of management students' experiences in the context of commercialisation pressures, explored in the following section.

2.1.4. Section Summary

This section began with an overview of the changing socio-political landscape surrounding UK higher education. The dominance of neo-liberal discourse in UK higher education public policies (Dolby, Dimitriadis & Willis, 2004; Johnson, 2016) and the governance of universities following choice-and-competition principles have led to significant changes in ways higher education is perceived and managed. These changes have led to some authors arguing that university sector is currently facing challenges resulting from the increased importance of performance and accountability in their practices (Peters, 1992; Collini, 2012; Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2015). At the same time, the emergence of these features, while relevant for universities and their practices, does not necessarily reflect the more fundamental issues of the "lack of

confidence and loss of identity” (Collini, 2012: 3). Instead, it is argued that the resolution of the crisis of basic principles and values embedded in higher education require a re-think of its key building blocks by exploring students as its key stakeholders, as well as the nature of their educational experiences.

With this in mind, the section continued by outlining the key academic discussion on the changing position of students in contemporary higher education. Here, the conception of students as ‘beings for uncertainty’ (Barnett, 2007) was explored and set against the dominant institutional and policy conception of students as consumers (Naidoo, 2003; Johnson, 2016; Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011) emerging from the commercialisation of their practices (Dearing, 1997). Here, a relationship was established between the political and organisational treatment of students as customers, and a symbolical shift from learners to customers, leading to fundamental changes in the meaning of students, their roles, expectations and, most notably, experiences of higher education.

The final part of the section explored the increasing interest in student experience, and different meanings given to it. Recent trends seem to be taking an approach to student experience as a post-hoc rationalisation and evaluation of the educational process, with the individual and the institutional views on student experience closely following the conception of students as consumers (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Delucchi & Smith, 1997). Following the critique of the consumer perspective on students, an alternative approach is suggested, by which student experiences take an active role in shaping the overall educational experience, while maintaining a position that not all experiences are educative, and do not influence education in the same way (Dewey, 1997).

To conclude, this section provided an important overview of the changing socio-political context in which UK higher education historically took place. It

also raised important questions regarding the challenges facing universities and other higher education institutions, as well as raising crucial questions with regards to students and their educational experiences. The following section is dedicated to narrowing the focus of the discussion down to the postgraduate management education context.

2.2. Features of contemporary management education

This section explores the key features and practices of contemporary management education. The first part of the section explores the dynamic historical development of the position of business schools in the university context, from their initially marginal position, to their increasingly central place in the current university reform. The second part is dedicated to the identification of the reasons behind the current position of business schools as a potential way forward for the entire university sector (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016). Here, the focus is placed on the distinctive features of contemporary management education and business school activities in relation to commodification of management education, and the resulting institutional focus on branding and organisational image.

In a recent Guest Editorial in the Academy of Management Learning & Education special issue on the legitimacy and impact of business schools, Pettigrew & Starkey (2016: 649) proclaimed:

Business schools and their role are [...] central to debates raised by the question “what are universities for and what will they look like in the future?” as new modes of delivery lead to a questioning of traditional models of higher education [...] The business school stands at the centre of the challenges facing the modern university.

From a historical perspective on business schools and its position within the university, Pettigrew & Starkey's statement seems somewhat surprising. Business and management research and teaching practices were often challenged and criticised by the established sciences during the 20th Century (Khurana, 2007; Kaplan, 2014). First schools of management and trade were developed in Europe in early 19th Century with ESCP Europe in Paris the first business school in the world founded in 1819. A strong expansion of management education, however, began in the late 19th Century, after the foundation of Wharton School of Finance and Commerce in 1881 (Kaplan, 2014), in support of the emerging managerial role required for running new forms of organisation in an industrial era (Khurana, 2007).

The expansion of business schools continued to grow even stronger after World War II, particularly in the USA and, more recently, in developing countries (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007). The growth in numbers and influence was, however, not followed by the acceptance of management research by the established sciences. The emergence of research-intensive trend in business schools after World War II led to the attempts to position management research as a part of social sciences, adopting a

... "scientific" approach of trying to discover patterns and laws, [replacing] all notions of human intentionality with a firm belief in causal determinism for explaining all aspects of corporate performance (Ghoshal, 2005: 77).

Following this, business schools were scrutinised for the production of nonsensical and unimpactful research that propagates rationality and self-interest maximisation (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004; Ghoshal, 2005). Another source of critique of business schools and their place within the university environment was the nature of the education they provided (Gioia, 2002; Nixon, Scullion &

Hearn, 2016). The still omnipresent question of the nature and the purposes of management education has been in the centre of the development of business schools since its very beginnings.

The basic consideration of what constitutes graduate work in business administration seems to me to lie in the purpose of the graduate training. If its purpose is to train “hands,” or technicians, or merely successful money-makers, in my judgment the course has no place in a graduate department of a university. On the other hand if its purpose is to train “heads” or future leaders in business, it has no difficulty in justifying its existence or place. (C.P. Biddle, Assistant Dean at Harvard Business School, 1926, cited in Khurana, 2007:5).

Biddle’s argument for the importance of management education being responsive to the development of a wider social context, as opposed to mere functional training in management practices, bears similarities with Robbin’s (1963) vision of the nature and purposes of higher education in the post-war UK. More recently, business school teaching practices were placed in a relationship with corporate scandals (Ghoshal, 2005; Fleming & Oswick, 2013) and financial crises (Giacalone & Wargo, 2009). Mintzberg (2004) argues that, by providing training that is limited to the functional elements of ‘doing business’, business schools produce graduates who are unequipped for the increasingly complex business world. He asserts that “using the classroom to help develop people already practicing management is a fine idea, but pretending to create managers out of people who have never managed is a sham.” (ibid: 5), and suggests that business schools teach wrong people about wrong things in a wrong way.

Others (Giacalone & Wargo, 2009; Rasche & Gilbert, 2015) questioned the role of business schools in warping the students’ sense of ethical business behaviour by promoting the deterministic notions of self-interest, profit maximisation and short-term thinking. Similarly, Ghoshal’s (2005) critique of

management education argues a clear connection between teaching in business schools, that could have taken place decades before, and the series of corporate scandals in the early 2000s. Other criticisms raised around the same time (Starkey, 2005; Zell, 2001; Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004, Bennis & O'Toole, 2005) all advocated for the necessity of reconceptualization of business school teaching and research practices for the 21st Century.

The discussion so far provided important insights into the key challenges facing contemporary business schools. It also raised a significant concern: If business schools are indeed failing to fulfil their educational purpose, what are the implications of using the business school model as a blueprint for the entire higher education sector (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016; Starkey, Hatchuel & Tempest, 2004)? Considering that the perception of business schools as success stories in higher education have been built on market-based indicators such as financial and growth performance (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), it is important to further explore the key characteristics of the management education market and the nature of its influence on the educational process.

The development of the markets in the sector required the reconceptualization of the educational experience through its commodification and standardisation to a measurable and, therefore, marketable service (Welch, 1988). In the context of the increasing dominance of neoliberal values since the 1980s (Dolby, Dimitriadis & Willis, 2004), business schools became the key proponents of free markets as the most efficient economic model. Gioia & Corley (2002) rather amusingly notice the poetic justice in contemporary business schools' being pressured to practice what they preached over the past decades - an almost tautological praise of competition in increasingly deregulated markets. Here, it is necessary to address commodification and standardisation as processes at the core of marketisation of management

education, as well as the resulting reliance on externally sourced organisational image and reputation. These processes will be explored in details in the following sections.

2.2.1. Commodification of management education

Commodification lies in the root of the neoliberal higher education politics and activities surrounding higher education over the recent decades, and the challenges it brings were widely discussed in years following the increased focus on commercial value of education. It is defined as “the treatment of higher education as a commercial commodity” (Welch, 1988: 388), and as a process that

... inexorably leads to standardisation, calculation and formulaic teaching [that] reduces quality into quantity and transforms an academic relationship between a teacher and a student into a transaction dominated by concerns that have little to do with education. (Furedi, 2011: 6)

The treatment of education as a commodity reflects the shift of focus from its use value to its exchange value (Ball, 2004; Willmott, 1995; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). The use value of educational practices is reflected in “its contribution to the development of the student as a person, as a citizen or at least as a depository and carrier of culturally valued knowledge” (Willmott, 1995: 1002). Along the similar lines, Karpov (2013) argues that the erosion of the focus on the use value in higher education has a negative influence on the creation of what he calls cultural backgrounds. With the focus shifting to the exchange value of education, the tangible, measurable outcomes of the educational process increasingly dominate the social and the political discourse (Johnson, 2016). Under this exchange regime, the value of education becomes measured

by the exchange value of the resulting degree on the labour market (Willmott, 1995). The emphasis on the exchange value in management education is fundamental to the ever-growing dominance, influence and numbers of external validation instruments, most notably specialised league tables (Corley & Gioia, 2000; Policano, 2007) that support the stakeholders' focus on tangible outcomes.

Commodification, however, not only shapes the institutional and individual behaviour and decision making; its influence expands beyond providing students with comparable information for an informed choice, or enabling business schools to focus on consumer-centred practices in a competitive market (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011). Instead, its presence is seen in the challenges facing business schools, including grade inflation (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007; Boretz, 2012), employment based curricula development (Parker, 2003), and the changes in the academic work (Willmott, 1995; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004; Knights & Clarke, 2014). Commodification also triggers the reduction of the interpersonal relationships to usage, exchange and exploitation (Gabriel & Lang, 2006) within the physical and conceptual environments, emphasising the exchange value of education (Policano, 2005).

2.2.2. Education as a singularity

After exploring the literature discussing the organisational and individual challenges in the wake of commodification of management education, it is important to explore commodification from the perspective of the purposes of education and its social and cultural role. While management education and its features remain at the centre of the discussion, the following points strongly relate to a wider context of education by establishing the relations between any

form of formal education, and its social, cultural and political dimensions and implications.

Following Karpik's (2010: 10) terminology, management education closely resembles what he calls a singularity, defined by a service that is "structured, uncertain and incommensurable". In terms of its structured nature, education is a multidimensional process not only in the context of the curriculum, but also in the context of the indivisibility of its outcomes. Following this, management education has a much wider impact than the one limited on the individual employability, career development and financial outcomes (Grineski, 2000; Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011); it also influences the graduates' immediate social and professional environments (particularly among highly international cohorts), as well as the wider social, political, and cultural contexts in which graduates work and live out their lives (Karpov, 2013).

Furthermore, education is also characterised by uncertainty. Here, Karpik (2010) makes a distinction between the uncertainty of interpretation and uncertainty of quality. In the context of education, the uncertainty of interpretation reflects its multidimensionality in relation to its transformational power (Dewey, 2004). In other words, education is inherently uncertain in its outcomes both for individuals and the society. Similarly, in terms of quality uncertainty, the transformative and somewhat mysterious nature of education and the multiplicity of its potential outcomes suggest the inability to predetermine its quality prior to its 'purchase'. Finally, still drawing from Karpik (2010), education is characterised by its inherent incommensurability, a process further explored in the coming sections of the chapter. Incommensurability of education arises from the political and ideological nature of commensurability as a social form, by which it "...denies

the possibility of intrinsic value, pricelessness, or any absolute category of value" (Espeland & Stevens, 1998: 324). In other words, the treatment of education as a clearly defined commodity is in contrast with education as a historical, social, political and culturally interdependent process, with a pervasive, yet often unobservable and implicit impact on individuals and society (Carr & Kemmis, 2004).

To summarise, commodification is a fundamental principle at the basis of marketisation and commercialisation of education. Following the current socio-political discourse on higher education, treating management education as a commodity (Welch, 1988; Furedi, 2011) reduces it to its capitalist value (McLaren, 2002; Tuchman, 2009), and enables the operation of the market-based exchange on the basis of its exchange value (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004). Moreover, as Karpov (2013: 36) reminds us, education cannot be viewed merely as a function of the society; behind any form of social development lies education, "...constituting the cultural heart of the life of society with its enduring values, traditions, pedagogical experience and aspirations to instill and hold on to its human foundation". Following this, the conception of education as a commodity is challenged by its innate incapability of being treated as a commodity due to its multidimensionality, the uncertainty of interpretation and quality, and its inability to be commensurated (Karpik, 2010).

The points made above raise significant concerns with regards to the increasing conception of education as a commodity in the wake of recent social and political changes (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007; Le Grand, 2009; Collini, 2017). Drawing the discussion back to the particularities of management education, the unprecedented reliance on market principles and devices necessarily require the institutional treatment of education as a commodity: specialised

rankings simplify and commensurate (Wedlin, 2006, Espeland & Sauder, 2007); accreditations standardise and legitimise (Durand, 2005; Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006); business schools compete (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004); and student choice is based on the signals on the market (Johnson, 2016; Shore & Wright, 2004). While universities and business schools share most of these features, their prevalence in management education suggests that, in contrast to the higher education sector in general, management education seem no longer to be merely in the process of commodification; instead, it *has become* a commodity. To further explore this point, the following section focuses on the increasing reliance on organisational image and branding.

2.2.3. Impression management: From substance to image

Relying on the previous discussion on the changing purposes of education, this section considers the resulting changing nature of the relationship between business schools and the students in the context of consumer culture that has been dominating all wakes of social activities. Consumer culture is defined as “a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 869). It assumes not only the purposeful development of commodities for the market exchange, but also the creation and manipulation of a cultural framework for their consumption, achieved through marketing activities (Holt, 2002). Within this cultural framework, a particular culture of consumption is created through the use of “commercially produced images, texts, and objects that particular groups use [...] to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members’ experiences and lives” (Kozinetz, 2001: 68). This view of contemporary

consumerist orientation resonates strongly with the increasing pushes towards marketisation and commercialisation of higher education (Sandlin & McLaren, 2009). As previously discussed, the perspective of education as a commodity is faced with challenges so profound (Ball, 2004; Karpik, 2010; Karpov, 2013) that it invites the question whether the commodified educational service can even be considered an education in the traditional sense of the term.

The rise of the importance of exchange value of management education (Ball, 2004; Willmott, 1995; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005) and the resulting redefinition of business schools and students to suppliers and customers (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011) also redefined how institutions formulate their image and manage their reputation (Gioia & Corley, 2002). In the context of the UK public policy (Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016), higher education institutions are encouraged to build their reputation on student satisfaction and the financial value their services bring (Grineski, 2000).

Building on the academic works on consumerism in higher education, Alvesson (2013) implicitly follows the key postulates of consumer culture, and asserts the increasing reliance on what he calls grandiosity in social arrangements, in a process which necessarily occurs at the expense of substance. Alvesson (2013: 8) argues that the focus on grandiosity as the “attempts to give yourself, your occupational group/organization, or even the society in which you live, a positive—if somewhat superficial—well-polished and status - enhancing image” is strongly reflected in the current social and material practices of higher education institutions. In this sense, image and branding become the core elements of strategic decisions and recruitment processes (Gioia & Corley, 2002; Sandlin & McLaren, 2009). This seems to be particularly the case in management education, where image has become a

key element of the relationship between the organisation and the students (Alvesson, 2013; Gioia & Corley, 2002), framing and, more importantly, changing both the expectations and the experienced realities of student experiences (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). Here, some valuable insights can be drawn from the brief look at the literature exploring organisational image.

The academic discussions on organisational image have a rich history. Traditionally, image was considered as a controlled image of the organisation manufactured for the external audiences (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). A more nuanced vision of organisational image was given by Alvesson (1990), who suggests the existence of multiple organisational images that result from both the organisational projection of its fabricated image on all levels of the organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 1997), and the recipients' (external or internal) conceptualisation of this received image. In other words, organisational image is a result of an interplay between organisational intentional and unintentional representation of itself, and the individual interpretation of such representations, as well as a co-creative element of organisational culture and identity.

In line with Alvesson's (1990) conclusions, Gioia & Thomas (1996) argue that the evolving organisational image of business schools (Starkey & Tempest, 2008) necessarily require changes in the organisational identity. Indeed, studies exploring academic identities suggest significant imbalances and fragilities in the academic perception of selves. These challenges occur both in the context of the wider socio-political reform of higher education (Willmott, 1995; Knights & Clarke, 2013), and in the context of specific reputational mechanisms emerging from the reform in the context of management education, including accreditations (Lejeune & Vas, 2009) and rankings

(Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Zell, 2001). As commercialisation provokes the changes in organisational identity, it also has a considerable influence on organisational culture (Hatch & Schultz, 1997) and, consequently, on the development of socio-material environments in the organisation (Schein, 1992).

Following Alvesson (1990) and Hatch & Schultz (1997), organisational image must be explored in a wider context than the stakeholder perceptions of the organisation as represented by top management (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). In other words, organisational image is complex and fluid; it is co-created by the organisational members and their perceptions of the organisational identity. Furthermore, image is both reflecting, and reflected in, the organisational culture as “a symbolic context within which interpretations of organisational identity are formed and intentions to influence organisational image are formulated” (Hatch & Schultz, 1997: 360).

With an increasing interest in business school image in the commercial context (Gioia & Corley, 2002; Alvesson, 2013), image holds an increasingly significant place in business school strategies. As a result, business schools in the UK and elsewhere are increasingly spending on marketing, and are either going, or have gone through, re-branding in order to become more attractive on the market (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007). Today, most UK business schools contain a dedicated team of marketing and branding professionals who make sure that the public image of their institution is maintained, and that their message differentiates them from other business schools, while remaining appealing to potential clients.

2.2.4. Section Summary

This section of the Literature review chapter builds on the previous section by exploring the features of contemporary management education. The starting point is the exploration of the reasons behind the significant shift in the relationship between business schools and universities. Following the profound changes in social and political surroundings, the features of business schools once considered incompatible with university practices increasingly became perceived as a potential way forward for the entire university sector (Hopwood, 1998; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016). The reasons for the increasing relevance of management education to the higher education sector are identified in the compatibility between the dominant market-based perspectives on higher education (Le Grand, 2009; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007; Johnson, 2016), the features of management education market (Wedlin, 2006; Durand, 2005; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004), and the increasingly commercialised business school approaches to delivery of commodified educational services.

The section continues with the exploration of commodification as a process fundamental to the mentioned features of management education market and business school practices (Welch, 1988; Furedi, 2011). A specific interest is placed on the changing expectations from business schools and, more generally, management education, which is also supported in the UK public policy (Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016). The value of education shifted from its use value, or the intrinsic, long term, immeasurable benefits of education to the individual and the wider society (Ball, 2004; Karpov, 2013) towards its exchange value, or the value of the tangible outcomes of education (namely degrees) on the employment market (Willmott, 1995).

The discussion continues with the implications and challenges of commodification for individual organisational members (Willmott, 1995; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004), higher education institutions (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007; Parker, 2003), and the relationships between them (Furedi, 2011). In line with the aim of the thesis to explore the fundamental questions regarding the purposes of higher education, the discussion moves beyond exploration of the implications of commodification towards the fundamental suitability of education to be commodified in the first place. Drawing from the work by Karpik (2010), education is compared to what he calls a singularity, or a product that cannot be commodified due to its multidimensionality, uncertainty of interpretation and quality, and incommensurability to a common metric (Espeland & Stevens, 1998).

Going back to the points made in previous sections of this chapter and the thesis, the inability of education to be commodified provides significant clues towards the fundamental questions in the basis of the current crisis of the university (Collini, 2012; Khurana, 2007; Peters, 1992). At the same time, the dominance of market devices and institutional behaviours and attitudes suggest that management education is no longer in the process of commodification, but can instead be viewed as a commodity. Here, an important connection is made between the institutional conceptions of management education as a commodity, and the increasing importance of organisational image.

Today, business schools operating on management education markets put much efforts and investments in marketing and branding, in attempts to attract potential students to increasingly expensive postgraduate programmes (Alvesson, 2013). These trends suggest that the shift from the focus on use value to the exchange value of education is very much present in business

school practices as well. While this conclusion seems hardly surprising, it is worth mentioning, as it provides a basis for the theoretical and empirical choices made in this thesis. Seeing organisational image as a perception of the organisation arising from a complex process involving a politically laden strategizing embedded within the symbolic context provided by the organisational culture, and interpreted by heterogeneous audiences (Alvesson, 1990; Hatch & Schultz, 1997), the question of the scope and the nature of its impact on student learning and social experiences remains underexplored.

As can be seen in the literature reviewed so far, higher education in the UK is going through substantive changes that are far more fundamental than an initial glance would suggest, with management education holding a place at the forefront. After reviewing the literature, it is suggested that the attributes of contemporary higher education, such as increased accountability (Power, 1999), measurability (Espeland & Sauder, 2007) and changes in financial and other management practices (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007) – are all grounded in three phenomena: (1) the introduction of service-based perspective on education, with institutions as providers, and students as consumers; (2) the resulting change in the socio-political and stakeholder expectations from use value of education to exchange value of its outcomes, and (3) the resulting interest and reliance on image at the expense of substance of education. The reviewed literature explored all three phenomena at length, but little has been said on their implications for students as key beneficiaries of the educational process, a question that is in the centre of this thesis.

Such exploration necessarily requires the contextualisation of a theoretical and empirical study within contexts that represent all three fundamental transformations on the one hand, and are explicitly or implicitly designed with

student consumption in mind on the other. First, specialised rankings are explored as a feature of management education that is rapidly expanding in scope and influence on students, business schools, and the management education market. The second theoretical and empirical focus of the thesis is placed on the changes in design and use of organisational spaces in business schools that have in recent years departed from the image of the traditional university. In this way space, as we will see in the final section of this chapter, reflects all three discussed phenomena and, as the findings suggest, is a vital element of student conceptualisation of education, as well as their learning and social experiences.

2.3. Specialised media rankings

Building on the discussions so far, this section explores the phenomenon of specialised media rankings dominating the management education sector. Specialised rankings, or league tables, developed and regularly published by for-profit news media organisations remain a distinctive feature of international postgraduate management education markets. First, a brief historical outlook is provided on the development of specialised media rankings since the 1980s, including their central role in the creation of the management education market, and their increasing proliferation and dominance as devices of market maintenance.

Next, specialised rankings are explored in the context of the designs and processes embedded in their creation, including commensuration, quantification and measurement. The discussion then explores rankings in the context of their power to reshape management education through creation and dissemination of an explicit ideological view of the purpose of higher education.

The final section explores the institutional and the individual responses and the relationship with specialised rankings. Here, the discussion explores the features of the 'rankings game' played by business schools, as well as the changes in institutional strategies to accommodate the commercial perspective of education supported by rankings. In terms of individual responses, the institutional implications of rankings have led to significant changes in how members perceive and identify with their business school.

2.3.1. On specialised rankings

The recent expansion of specialised rankings began with Business Week's publication of their first full-time MBA programme commercial ranking in 1988. The interest of Business Week in management education was fairly intuitive at the time, as well as undeniably profit oriented. As previously discussed, the 1980s were characterised by the increasing interest in choice-and-competition modes of public services delivery (Le Grand, 2009), governed by managerial practices based on measurability, accountability and control (Power, 1999; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007). By the end of the 1980s, the rapidly growing management education sector showed potential waiting to be exploited.

... I felt there was no marketplace, really, to make the schools even pay attention to demand ... So what I thought was this, one thing that a ranking would actually do is to create a market where none had existed. Create a market where schools could be rewarded and punished for failing to be responsive to their two prime constituents: the students and the corporations" (Founder, BusinessWeek rankings, in Wedlin, 2006: 11)

Very soon after the success of BusinessWeek, the numbers and the types of specialised media rankings quickly multiplied to a point in which management

education became a unique sector in higher education in terms of the numbers of different rankings (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). An overview of the methodological approaches to different MBA rankings (Policano, 2005) shows that, while the same basic principles are followed, there are significant differences in approaches to rankings. Differences are found not only in the specific weights given to particular factors, but also in the range of factors and data sources used. As a result, different rankings are prone to providing very different results to their customers (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

The emergence of a variety of different approaches to rankings reflects the necessity to differentiate from the competition to attract paying customers. The profit orientation, thus, inevitably affects the methodological decisions, presentation of the results, and the transparency of the ranking process (Policano, 2007). As the numbers of specialised rankings rapidly grew, media companies increasingly struggled to differentiate based on relevant factors of the design. This resulted in attempts to differentiate based on less significant or even insignificant features of education. For instance, until recently Business Week hosted a variety of topics that have little to no connections with the student educational experience, including the league tables identifying “Best Schools for Tan”, “Best schools for Snowbirds”, or “Schools for People Who Like to Sleep in Class” (Bloomberg BusinessWeek, 2014).

The success of the 1988 BusinessWeek’s MBA rankings and the subsequent proliferation of various specialised rankings (Financial Times, Forbes, Guardian and The Times Higher Education, to name a few) sent out a strong indication of changing times in front of the business schools. It has also raised significant academic interest and criticism, from their role in marketisation and commercialisation of management education (Gioia & Corley, 2002, Ghoshal,

2005), to their influence on business schools and their members (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Zell, 2001).

Specialised rankings act as important mechanisms for market maintenance in three ways. First, the basic assumption underlying specialised rankings is the conception of higher education as a commodity (Welch, 1988; Furedi, 2011). Second, by positioning and assessing business schools as suppliers, rankings actively engage in their standardisation, monitoring and control (Naidoo, 2003; Wedlin, 2006). Finally, by explicitly positioning students as consumers (Zell, 2001; Naidoo, 2003), specialised rankings act as key drivers of the change in student perceptions of management education from use value to exchange value (Willmott, 1995; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005), thus blurring the line between the “academic relationship and a commercial transaction” (Furedi, 2011: 3).

2.3.2. Features of rankings

Recently, various ranking technologies have been explored particularly in the context of their creation, development and dissemination (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012; Pollock & D’Adderio, 2012). These works explore the increasing influence of technology on social and organisational lives (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008), and the resulting relationship between the social and the material. A particular empirical focus is placed on exploring the phenomenon of ranking systems such as TripAdvisor (Scott & Orlikowski, 2012; Jeacle & Carter, 2011; Orlikowski & Scott, 2014) and their increasing role as accountability mechanisms in the wake of the social movement towards stronger accountability and transparency (Power, 1999).

Following the reviewed literature (e.g. Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012), three key design features that explicitly and implicitly influence the consumption of rankings are identified: (1) the socio-material features of the ranking device; (2) the reliance of rankings on commensuration, and (3) the self-fulfilling nature of ranking-induced realities.

2.3.2.1. The 'ranking device'

Recently, considerable interest was raised in exploring the mutually constitutive relationship between the material and the social in the context of markets (McKenzie, 2009). To this end, Muniesa, Millo & Callon (2007: 2) introduced the concept of market devices as “material and discursive assemblages that intervene in the construction of markets”. Following this line of argument, the active role of objects in market construction and maintenance also assumes their active role in shaping the nature and the value of the product or service offered on that market (Callon & Muniesa, 2005).

Building on Muniesa, Millo & Callon's work, Pollock & D'Adderio (2012) propose the notion of a “ranking device” in their exploration of how rankings contribute to creation of markets. For authors, ranking mechanisms are market devices whose physical and graphic features necessarily influence the way how the information is perceived and consumed. The authors (2012: 2) argue that “... devices do more than simply facilitate the production and communication of a ranking. They actively participate in their shaping”. By placing business schools on the list, specialised rankings create a competitive environment in which the movement on the list is often based on insignificant differences that were given meaning through the specific position on the list (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008; Corley & Gioia, 2000).

As mentioned before, rankings emerged as a part of the effort to construct the management education market (Wedlin, 2006) and are, thus, its constitutive element. The question of the choice of a ranking as a device, however, has been scarcely mentioned in management education literature. Espeland & Lom (2015) draw comparisons between rankings and ratings to exemplify different approaches to valuating quality. Authors argue that such choice may have profound influence on what valuation is based on, as well as how the players on the market behave. A similar point was made by Policano (2007) in the context of management education rankings. His proposal that rating system would decrease the institutional focus on minute and insignificant movements on the league table was quickly dismissed by one of the ranking editors who stated that "... [media companies] would never adopt any change that would decrease circulation" (Policano, 2007: 46).

2.3.2.2. Commensuration in rankings

While commensuration has already been broadly explored in the previous section of this chapter, here it is discussed in the context of ranking devices. With the increased focus on auditability and the standardisation, the assessment of value, quality and performance of commodities requires their features to be quantified (Muller, Porter & Rehder, 1997; Eisner, 2005) into numbers as universally understood language (Lynch, 2015). Furthermore, the reliance of specialised rankings on user friendliness and simplification of complex features of higher education also requires the commensuration as a process of "measurement of characteristics normally represented by different units according to a common metric" (Espeland & Stevens, 1998: 315) by transforming qualitative features into quantitative measurements (Bermiss, Zajac & King, 2014). Commensuration is, therefore, a political mechanism

(Espeland & Stevens, 1998). It constructs the interpretive framework of the market through purposeful inclusion of favourable features of the commodity in question, while excluding the less favourable ones. This way, commensuration acts like a standardisation mechanism, whereby distinctive characteristics of individual organisations are rejected, and focus is placed on the shared features (Kornberger, 2017).

Considering that the complexity of the process and the uncertainty of the outcomes render higher education incommensurable (Karpik, 2010), rankings are unable to act as indicators of the quality of education and student experience without re-conceptualising and drastically simplifying the meaning and the purpose of education and the student experience. In other words, the influence of rankings lie in their power to arbitrarily choose favourable features of education and, by doing so, reinforce the institutional focus on these specific segments. In this sense, rankings maintain their relevance through warping the perception of the market to their needs.

2.3.2.3. Self-fulfilling prophecies

In the wake of these issues, the architects of rankings have recently begun to publicly comment on the limitations of their products. Della Bradshaw, a key figure in creation of Financial Times rankings, has stated in her 2013 interview: “I don’t think you should ever make a choice of business school based on, solely on, rankings. I mean, that would just be silly. And that [business schools] wouldn’t want these students anyway” (Bradshaw, 2013: 3:32). Similarly, 2016 BusinessWeek rankings (2017) come with a following disclaimer:

This year’s ranking provides a thorough picture of the current landscape of full-time MBA programs, but a suitable program for one

person might be an odd fit for another. Don't let rankings alone make your school decision for you.

Espeland & Sauder (2007) argue that rankings, being both highly influential and fundamentally flawed, provoke a process of creating 'self-fulfilling prophecies' as "*...dynamic social mechanisms...*" which involve "*... false definitions of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false definition off the situation come true*" (Espeland & Sauder, 2007: 11, original emphasis).

The consumption of such products, therefore, effectively turns readers into carriers of false realities (features, expectations, outcomes) of management education. In line with the view of rankings as a market device (Muniesa, Millo & Callon, 2007), the features of ranking-based management education market emerge from the role of rankings in instilling and validating values that underlie the commensuration process. At the same time, paraphrasing Thomas & Thomas (1928: 572), when something is defined as real, it becomes real in its consequences. In other words, Espeland & Sauder (2007: 11) suggest that "rankings create expectations [...], and people change their behaviour accordingly". On the other hand, their constantly increasing popularity and influence suggest that the values embedded in – and disseminated through – specialised rankings are in line with the stakeholders' perceptions of what management education ought to be. As one of the participants in Zell's (2001: 326) study noticed, "[Media rankings] ... are picking something up. Whether it's accurate or not is beside the point. In the market-place, it's perception that counts".

To summarise, the literature presented in this part of the literature review exposes several important characteristics of specialised rankings. Their popularity based on simplicity and user friendliness is based on the

commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1998) of inherently incommensurable (Karpik, 2010) features of management education through simplification of complex processes, relationships and outcomes to a common, quantified metric. Apart from providing only a partial picture of the sector in a numerical form, the presentation of findings in the form of the list give meaning to meaningless differences between schools (Policano, 2007), and creates a competitive, market-like environment in which schools operate. More importantly, and due to their influence and popularity, specialised rankings are suggested to have a key place in misrepresenting management education to their image, thus making their readers the carriers of, if not false, then at least incomplete, picture of management education (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). This way, the simplified values found in the basis of specialised rankings are transformed into the new, highly political, and not necessarily desirable, realities in which business schools and students shape their practices, expectations and experiences.

After exploring the key features of specialised rankings, and establishing their influence on the creation and maintenance of the management education market, the following sections explore institutional and individual reactions and responses to specialised rankings.

2.3.3. Specialised rankings in educational contexts

With the increasing influence of rankings on management education, a considerable academic interest was placed on the ways rankings are received and accepted by universities, business schools and their stakeholders. This literature can be broadly divided into studies exploring institutional responses to rankings as a new and dominating factor in business schools' strategic

activities, as well as organisational and educational practices, and into literature discussing the rising influence of rankings on organisational members, with a particular interest placed on the reactions from the academic staff and school management.

2.3.3.1. Institutional reactions to specialised rankings – the rankings game

In management education literature, the institutional responses to the emergence of specialised rankings are typically compared to competitive game-playing, or “playing the rankings game” (Corley & Gioia, 2000; Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008; Policano, 2005, 2007). Corley & Gioia (2000) suggest four basic rules of playing the ‘rankings game’: (1) business schools must play the game in order to compete on the management education market; (2) once playing, business schools cannot quit the game, as this would potentially harm their reputation. Furthermore, business schools have little opportunity to protest or challenge the rules; (3) the criteria upon which rankings are created may change, making the game uncertain and frustrating; and (4) there are no winners in the game, with a small number of schools always in top places on the table.

Following this, playing the rankings game seems as a choice that each business school can make. With most rankings to an extent relying on their active engagement, business schools can withhold their participation. However, even if the choice is made not to cooperate, business schools cannot opt-out from being ranked. Furthermore, business schools somewhat reluctantly accepted that media rankings are perceived as being both popular and legitimate in the eyes of their stakeholders, particularly students and employers. Additionally, business schools operating within universities are experiencing strong institutional pressures toward involvement in media rankings. In their

position as 'cash cows' by universities (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004; Friga, Bettis & Sullivan, 2003), business schools are inclined to see themselves as forced to conform to the rankings driven market in order to attract students who are willing and able to pay high tuition fees for their education and training.

While Corley and Gioia's (2000) rules remain somewhat vague and overly general, they also suggest the reasons behind the initial reluctance of business schools to get involved in rankings, as such involvement assumes uncertainty and the loss of control over the key strategic decisions. Moreover, the limitations of using a ranking device (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012) and the fundamental issues with commensuration of the incommensurable (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Karpik, 2010) have not gone unnoticed by business schools and their staff. Still, despite these shortcomings of the ranking game, business schools have been increasingly following its rules.

Consequently, business schools are incentivised to shift their strategic focus and their capital and labour investments from educational objectives towards the efforts to increase their reputation and image on the market (Policano, 2007; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Alvesson, 2013). These efforts are maintained and coordinated by a growing number of administrative staff involved in branding, marketing, accreditations and rankings (Policano, 2007). The aforementioned changes and developments suggest that specialised rankings are successful in pressuring business schools to be "more business and less school" (Gioia & Corley, 2002: 109).

However, following the standards imposed by specialised rankings by and large provides a challenge for business schools (Corley & Gioia, 2000). In contrast to accreditation standards (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006), ranking standards are created by for-profit organisations, whose core activities are not within higher education, and whose interests are largely connected to

generating sales revenue from their products (AACSB, 2005). As a result, the ranking standards do not necessarily include the industry best practice, as they do in the case of accreditations (Cooper, Parkes & Blewitt, 2014). Moreover, arbitrary, subtle changes made in the standards makes it very hard for business schools to strategically plan their actions and investments, particularly in the long run (Gioia & Corley, 2002).

2.3.3.2. Accountability, reputation, and individual responses to rankings

Specialised rankings are viewed as an influential and powerful indicator of business schools' success (Corley & Gioia, 2000) by which stakeholders are either rewarding or punishing the institution. At the same time, the explicit focus of rankings on measuring the educational outcomes (Wedlin, 2006), or the exchange value of the education (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004), raised significant concerns (see AACSB, 2005). First, the focus on measurement potentially lead to business schools' placing their focus solely on the performance of the measured outcomes, while neglecting the quality of the processes leading to favourable outcomes, a behaviour already noticed in other markets (e.g. Scott & Orlikowski, 2012). The processual nature of education is, however, incompatible with such approach, leading business schools towards other strategies for keeping the stakeholders satisfied, including investments in non-education related activities and services (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007). Second, the complexity and ambiguity of higher education, and the multiplicity of roles it holds in individual and social development makes it difficult to define what should business schools be accountable for and to whom. In other words, while rankings empower some stakeholders (namely students) by providing them with means for punishing their institution if the expectations are not met, they also push business schools away from

meaningful education with long-term benefits, towards strategies aimed at providing instant gratification for students.

An important part of the appeal of rankings is the assumption of the reputational value they bring to students and institutions, leading to more high quality student applicants who will, upon graduation, secure high-paid jobs (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). In other words, if the business school is top ranked, it is assumed that it is able to attract better students willing to pay premium fees. However, top ranked business schools in most cases already have a strong brand attached to their name – Harvard Business School, London Business School, INSEAD, Stanford Graduate School of Business, to name a few (Financial Times, 2017). What is more, the reputation of these institutions was not necessarily built on their performance in rankings, nor do these schools necessarily agree to play the ‘rankings game’, or agree to change in order to conform to the rankings standards.

On the other hand, media rankings, similar to accreditations, can have a pivotal role in putting schools with a less developed reputation on a global map. For example, MSc in Management at Mannheim Business School was in 2016 FT MSc Management rankings featured on the 14th place (FT, 2017b), putting the programme and the school among the best in the world. In contrast, Mannheim University was featured in 2016 QS University rankings between 411th and 420th place globally (QS, 2017). Specialised rankings, therefore, can allow the business schools to grow their reputation that will presumably lead to increased ability to attract students and more funding.

The influence of media rankings is not limited to the institutional level. Elsbach & Kramer’s (1996) investigation into the effect of 1992 Business Week survey on ranked business schools’ identity as perceived mainly by academic staff showed that Business Week rankings pose a threat to the perceived

identity both in terms of the perceived core characteristics and status of the school. Participants, regardless of their school's position in the ranking, felt threatened by their perspective that Business Week failed to take into consideration the key values and characteristics of their business schools. Similarly, Corley & Gioia's (2000) study involving interviews with top 50 business schools' management teams uncovers the strong belief that media rankings force business schools into "... a contrived, socially constructed and socially sustained..." competition (ibid: 320). Moreover, Zell's (2001) empirical research among staff in a top-ranked business school suggest the significant changes occurring after the institution dropped from top 10 on Business Week's list. His analysis suggests the confusion and the frustration felt among academics caught between the traditional perceptions of what good higher education entails, and the then emerging consumerism embedded and supported by specialised rankings. While the literature indicates the complex and multi-layered relationship between academic staff and rankings, the student experiences with rankings are largely neglected in management education literature.

2.3.4. Section Summary

The literature review presented in this section explores the academic debates on specialised rankings and their influence as instruments of accountability (Wedlin, 2006; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012) and reputation (Policano, 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2000) for business schools competing on the international postgraduate management education market. More importantly, the literature was used to unpack the foundations of specialised rankings, discussing their features emerging from their role as a market device (Muniesa, Millo & Callon, 2007; Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012; Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008) and their

reliance on measurement, quantification and commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Lynch, 2015; Tolofari, 2005) of features of management education that are arguably incommensurable (Karpik, 2010). Key limitations of rankings are also explored, particularly in connection to their design in a form of a list (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012), and their significant influence on organisational (Corley & Gioia, 2000; Policano, 2007; Gioia & Corley, 2002) and individual behaviours and practices (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Corley & Gioia, 2000; Zell, 2001).

Literature suggests that the influence of rankings surpasses their role as tools for building reputation for the business schools, and as user-friendly sources of information for potential students. Instead, specialised rankings act as engines of marketisation and commercialisation by creating and instilling specific expectations in the market (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). Market devices (Muniesa, Millo & Callon, 2007) or, more specifically, ranking devices (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012, therefore, play a significant role in the political and ideological dissemination of preferred conceptions of higher education (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007). The initial negative responses to rankings by the business schools seem to reiterate this point, as involvement in the 'rankings game' (Corley & Gioia, 2000) necessarily requires not only the loss of the organisational identity and control, but also the change in the very nature of higher education. In this sense, rankings provoked significant confusion and distress among business schools and academics, whose work gradually shifted from educating students towards serving customers.

The consumerist approach to education supported by rankings also had significant impact on business schools, whose strategic priorities significantly shifted towards ensuring customer satisfaction. While these changes can be seen in the strategic shift from substance to image and branding (Alvesson,

1990; 2013; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Sandlin & McLaren, 2009), perhaps the largest change can be seen in the characteristics and the design of business school spaces. Following this, the next section of this chapter is dedicated to the exploration of the academic debates on organisational space.

2.4. Organisational space

This section of the literature review explores the academic discussions on organisational space. Following the increasing interest in space in organisational studies literature, the section explores its change from being a neutral feature to becoming an active part of organisational life. Following recent theorisations of organisational space (Lefebvre, 1991; Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Dale & Burrell, 2008), the discussion explores three mutually constitutive approaches to space: (1) the physical attributes of space; (2) power relations represented and mediated through organisational space; and (3) the lived space. A particular interest is placed on characteristics of the design as means for implicit, but active representation of organisational values and norms (Hershberger, 1970; Psarra, 2009). In the final part, the discussion moves towards the broader exploration of the relationship between education, experience and space. Here, the features and the design of educational spaces are placed in the context of the hidden curriculum as hidden and implicit features of the educational process shaping student experience (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Margolis, 2001; Eisner, 1985; Bregar Golobič, 2012).

2.4.1. Space in educational contexts

In education literature, spaces have traditionally been treated as “neutral settings; in Foucault’s terms fixed, dead and immobile containers of settings”

(Taylor & Spicer, 2007: 325) within which pedagogy takes place. Studies in this tradition explored how educators utilise space to enhance communication (Sommer, 1977) and influence classroom dynamics (Rae & Sands, 2013). In these works, space is perceived as a passive factor in social interaction, but also as a feature that can be employed as means of coercion, discipline and control (Lefebvre, 1991), or a factor of (usually) top-down manipulation.

At the same time, the pivotal role of spatial design of higher education institutions in fostering desirable learning environments has been recognised in practice. For instance, the case of Building 20 at MIT provides a compelling example of how the malleability of learning spaces influences student development and academic excellence (Hill, Travaglini, Brandeau & Stecker, 2010). Being a temporary building that was meant to be demolished after the war, it remained insignificant, and even nameless, for the university management throughout the years (Brand, 1994). Such status, however, made Building 20 appealing to researchers and students who were drawn to the possibility of their full 'ownership' of the space. This meant that the occupants were given an active role in repurposing, redesigning and using the building in ways that fostered creativity and independence of thought (Hill et al, 2010). As one of the users noted, "It is kind of messy, but by God it is procreative!" (Lettvin in Garfinkel, 1991). The extreme malleability of Building 20 space, represented in numerous narratives of purposeful destruction and reconstruction of its interior, is perceived to be in the basis of the ground-breaking research and innovation, ranging from electronics to linguistics (Hill et al, 2010). Although it was demolished in 1998 after over 50 years of service, the ideal of a family-like atmosphere supporting creativity and freedom that was materialised in Building 20 remains a vibrant part of the MIT culture and the student folklore (Undercurrents, 1997).

The link between commercialisation of UK higher education and the features of university spaces has recently gained wider recognition, particularly in the context of the increasing expenditure on new, ‘flashy’ campuses and buildings (Marmot, 2015). The consumerist approach to students and their time at the university seem to have significant influence not only on the quality of the premises, but also on the design features of university buildings.

Table 1: Major investments in UK business school facilities

Business School	Type of investment	Year of refurbishment	Cost
London Business School	Refurbishment	2017	£60m
Imperial College Business School	New Building	2004	£27m
Warwick Business School	Extension	Ongoing, 3 rd stage	£30m
Cass Business School	New building	2002	£42m
University of Edinburgh Business School	Extension & Refurbishment	2010	£17m
Durham Business School	Extension & Refurbishment	2013	£16.6m
Strathclyde Business School	Extension	2015	£23m
Leeds Business School	Refurbishment & Expansion	1999; expansion expected until 2020	n/a
Lancaster University Management School	Redevelopment	2019 (expected)	£40m
Bradford School of Management	New building	2010	n/a
Alliance Manchester Business School	Redevelopment	2018 (expected)	£50m
Exeter Business School	Expansion	2015	£25m
Bath School of Management	New building	planned	£39m
Adam Smith Business School	Refurbishment & Expansion	planned	£18m
Henley Business School	New building	2009	£12.5m

Sources: Compiled from multiple online entries, and personal communication. A detailed list of references can be found in Appendix B.

This is particularly the case in the context of business school spaces: the analysis of the investments in facilities of 16 UK business schools featured in 2016 FT MSc Management rankings (Financial Times, 2017b) presented in

Table 1 indicates that 15 business schools have either undergone major refurbishment processes, or have moved into new buildings since 2000, with Leeds Business School the only institution that moved into a new building before the turn of the century. The analysis suggests that five out of 16 business schools (including Leeds Business School) are currently in the process of either planning or undertaking works on new buildings or refurbishing the existing ones, with investments ranging from £12.5m to £60m.

The extent of investments in new business school spaces in many cases relates to the expansion of operations beyond current capacities in order to accommodate additional students. At the same time, these projects have allowed business schools, architects and interior designers to accommodate the requirements of the dominant social and political perspectives on higher education (Johnson, 2016; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007) into the physical characteristics of space. By doing so, the values and norms in the foundations of marketisation and commercialisation of management education become a part of the hidden, or implicit, curriculum.

Implicit, or informal, curriculum represents the hidden practices and tacit features of education that implicitly shape experience and learning (Margolis, 2001; Eisner, 1985; Bregar Golobič, 2012). Although often placed in contrast to explicit curriculum in the course booklets, implicit or informal curriculum is a concept with a broader scope (Caza & Brower, 2015): as Ward (1990:10) argues, the concept “helps us to understand how society’s social, cultural, economic and political values are transmitted through educational structures which claim in the name of education itself to be value-free”. Implicit curriculum is seen as being intentionally created to enhance, enable, or manipulate learning (McCabe, Butterfield & Trevino, 2006; Blasco, 2015) and socialisation practices (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Margolis, 2001) in educational settings.

The concept of the hidden curriculum is useful for exploring the interplay between organisational space in business schools and student experiences, namely how the norms and values represented in its design (Hershberger, 1970; Psarra, 2009) are implicitly imposed on students (Bregar Golobič, 2012). As Margolis (2001: 2) argues, “much of the built environment [...] of higher education institutions are hiding in plain sight precisely so that [they remain] undetected”.

To summarise, academic discussions in educational contexts considered organisational space as a passive element of organisational life that can be utilised to manage and manipulate communication and dynamics of the educational process (Sommer, 1977; Rae & Sands, 2013). However, the recent breadth of investments in new business school facilities, coinciding with the changes in social and political conceptions of management education, raises the question of how the norms and the values embedded in spatial design (Psarra, 2009) shape student educational experiences. Following the view of organisational space and its design as an intrinsic part of the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Margolis, 2001), organisational space is placed in an explicit relationship with student everyday life in the business school, as well as their social and educational interactions and experiences. To further explore this relationship, it is important to explore the recent developments in academic literature on space and its role in organisations.

2.4.2. Organisational space: from passive and apolitical to active and political

Similar to educational literature, space has traditionally been used as neutral, or passive setting for organisational life in organisational research (Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Recently, however, new insights and understandings of

organisational space (Paechter, 2004) emerged, with the increased interest in the phenomenological approach to studying space (Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Taylor & Spicer, 2007). One of the most influential authors in current theorisations of organisational space is Henri Lefebvre. In his critique of the social neutrality of space in social sciences (Lefebvre, 1991: 11), he argued for the reconceptualization of space as “... socially produced and simultaneously socially producing; concurrently material and imaginary; intimately connected to embodiment; and irreducibly political” (Dale & Burrell, 2008: 6). Following his and other work cited in this section, the academic debates on organisational space revolve around three approaches to understanding the relationship between space, organisations, and individuals: (1) physical attributes of organisational space; (2) the relationship between power and organisational space; and (3) the lived space.

2.4.2.1. Physical attributes of organisational space

The physical attributes of organisational space – most notably its size and layout – remain a highly influential perspective used in organisational research. Studies in consumer behaviour and the organisation of workplace (e.g. Curhan, 1972; Clements-Croome, 2006) largely explore the physical attributes of space and the individuals engaging with such spaces, e.g. customers in supermarkets, or employees in an organisation. Such studies, customarily following a positivist research tradition, consider organisational space as a medium for efficiency optimisation (product sales or employee productivity), thus leaving it largely unproblematised, passive, non-agentic and apolitical.

2.5.2.2. The relationship between power and organisational space

The rise of awareness of the importance of space in organisational research sparked interest in the relationship between the material enactments of space, and the resulting power relations within organisations (Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Drawing from works of Marx and Foucault, this approach perceives organisational space as means of coercion, discipline and control. Space becomes an active, political factor of usually top-down manipulation, achieved through organised spaces as "... deliberate constructions of space to embody certain conceptualisations (e.g. functionality, control) in materialised form" (Dale & Burrell, 2008: 9). Following this research tradition, a number of publications have implicitly used the relationship between power and organisational space to explore the issues such as organisational silence in business schools (Anteby, 2013), changing environments and creation of institutional legitimacy (Policano, 2005; Wedlin, 2006), the relationship between business schools and academic employees' identity development (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010), and the influences of design, architecture and spatial planning on student learning routines and practices (Nespor, 1994). While this perspective clearly departs from the purely geographical conceptualisation of space, its top-down perspective at the same time neglects the malleability of utilised and experienced organisational space, or the 'lived space' (Dale & Burrell, 2008: 10).

2.5.2.3. The lived space

More recently, researchers studying organisational space are called to take into consideration the ways space is used and experienced by organisational members. Spatial practices in organisations emerge from our historical and

experiential understanding of their particular space, simultaneously influencing and being influenced by our routines and practices (Dale & Burrell, 2008). Members' engagement with the organisational space is, therefore, embedded in their historical understanding of the organisation and its practices, as well as with the experience gained in these settings. An excellent example of the importance of understanding spatial practices in management education contexts is given by Nespor (1994), whose study in schools of physics and management shows significant differences in how students socialise, study and learn in institutions characterised by very different spatial and material practices. In the lived space, power relations and spatial practices overlap in a way that "... the material and cultural are fused... [and] ...signs, images and symbols are made material" (Dale & Burrell, 2008: 10). As an individually subjective element of organisational life, space is characterised by constant tensions between its physical limitations, the power relations as materialised through its design, and its malleability in everyday practice. The influence of space on organisational life is, therefore, manifested in the entanglement of its ideological conceptualisation envisioned through its design and architecture, and the individual practices of and in organisational space, based upon the members' understanding of the organisation.

In light of the mentioned features and approaches to organisational space, Lefebvre (1991) proposes the existence of multiple, overlapping perspectives on spatiality. First, spatiality is produced in the context of "spatial relations within a particular place" (Dale & Burrell, 2008: 9). Lefebvre argues that the physicality of specific spaces is embedded not only in users' conceptualisations of what that particular space represents, but also in the historical meaning of that space (Dale & Burrell, 2008). In management education literature, a specific focus has been recently put on the relationship

between the physical dimensions of the curricular space and the imaginary spaces fostering creativity and innovative learning (Blasco, 2015), as well as its power in creating heterotopic curricular practices that encourage critical and imaginative thinking (Beyes & Michels, 2011). Nespor's (1994) study of learning spaces in schools of physics and management explores the learning patterns and practices among students on very different programmes, revealing the interplay between power, curriculum and individual experience of space in student learning practices.

Second, spatiality is produced through its purposeful planning and design, aimed at materialisation of particular values and goals of the organisation (Dale & Burrell, 2008). In the management education context, as mentioned before, spatial designs in contemporary business schools aim to reflect the new socio-political position of the institutions and the students within the commercialised management education markets. Finally, spatiality is produced through the individual experiential imagination of space that is materialised through symbolism and aesthetics (Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Dale & Burrell, 2008). In other words, space and the symbolic meanings represented in its design, tend to be perceived and experienced differently by individual organisational members and groups.

Lefebvre's (1991) fragmentation of organisational space provides a conceptual framework that allows an inclusion of multiple perspectives – social, institutional and individual – to the analysis, interpretation and understanding of business school spaces. It also encourages the exploration of both physical and imaginary (Nespor, 1994; Blasco, 2015; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010) spaces in business schools without making an analytical separation between the two.

2.4.3. Section Summary

The reviewed organisational and educational literature suggests a significant shift in theorising organisational space. While traditionally treated merely as a passive container in which organisational life takes place (Taylor & Spicer, 2007), organisational space has recently emerged as an active part of organisations and educational settings. The view of space and spatial practices as simultaneously social, material and cultural (Dale & Burrell, 2008; Dale, 2005) allows the student experience of business school space, gathered through empirical investigation, to be placed in analytical relationship with the values and norms represented in spatial design (Hershberger, 1970; Psarra, 2009). In other words, organisational space is considered an intrinsic part of the business school hidden curriculum (Margolis, 2001; Giroux & Penna, 1979) as hidden and implicit practices and features of education that indirectly influence students and their educational experiences (Apple, 1971; Martin, 1976; Eisner, 1985).

This point is particularly interesting in the context of the significant investments made in new facilities among business schools competing on Financial Times rankings. Furthermore, the changes in the spatial designs and features coincide with the changes in social and political conceptions of higher education and the emergence of consumerist approaches to education in business schools. Following the view on space as an active element of organisational life, it is important to explore the extent of the embeddedness of market values and norms in spatial design, and the extent of their influence on students and their experiences in the business school.

Such exploration requires the understanding of the academic debates on organisational space. In the last several decades, studies in organisational

space revolved around three approaches to researching space, namely its physical characteristics, its role in mediating power, and the ways individuals experience and utilise space (Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Dale & Burrell, 2008). In the light of these approaches, Lefebvre (1991) offers a conceptual framework of spatiality that features three distinctive, but analytically indivisible elements: (1) the indivisibility of the individual understanding of space and its historically constructed meaning, (2) a deliberate materialisation of organisational values embedded in spatial design, and (3) fusing the cultural and the material through materialisation of symbols and signs.

This section represents the final part of the literature review presented for the purpose of this thesis. In line with the reviewed literature and the broad research interest presented in the Introduction chapter of this thesis, the following section includes the formulation of research questions at the basis of the empirical research conducted as a part of this thesis.

2.5. Research questions

The reviewed literature suggests significant gaps in the understanding of the nature of student experience in contemporary higher education environments. While the reviewed literature largely explores the socio-political and organisational tensions arising from the increased commercialisation and marketisation of higher education, little empirical attention has been placed on the exploration of the implications of the resulting changes on students and their educational experiences. To this end, this study focuses on two distinctive contexts: (1) specialised media rankings as an increasingly dominant factor in higher education in general and management education in particular, and (2) the emergence of distinctive spatial features of contemporary business schools.

The literature review suggests that both aspects share similarities as active elements in the student experience, albeit in different ways. As devices in the foundation of the creation and maintenance of management education markets (Wedlin, 2006; Hazelkorn, 2011), specialised rankings embed and explicitly promote the effectiveness of the market competition between different providers for the benefit of student consumers. This is achieved through commensuration of heterogeneous features of education to a common metric (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Espeland & Sauder 2007), the emphasis on the exchange value of education (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004), and through artificially created competition between individual programmes and institutions (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012). While the reviewed literature does suggest the active role of rankings in student choices of educational institutions (Gioia & Corley, 2002; AACSB, 2005; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011), the ways specialised rankings influence the student experience remain underexplored. Also, the active engagement of business schools in rankings suggests that the values represented in and by specialised rankings also translate into business schools' organisational and educational activities (Corley & Gioia, 2000; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008), including the ways space is designed and organised (Policano, 2005).

The recent investment trends in top-ranked UK business schools' spaces (see Appendix B) require a closer examination of their features, particularly due to the active role of space in the hidden curriculum (Margolis, 2001; Eisner, 1985; Bregar Golobič, 2012). Following the notion of spatiality in mediating organisational values and norms (Hershberger, 1970; Psarra, 2009), such inquiry aims to explore the extent to which the values explicitly promoted and represented in specialised rankings are also embedded in the features of the business school space and, ultimately, in the student educational experiences.

Following the overall aim of this thesis, and keeping in mind the implications of the mentioned contexts for student experience, the following research question is proposed:

Research question 1.1: How do specialised media rankings shape student perceptions of their educational experience?

The second question implies that specialised media rankings represent more than information tools, and that they have an active role in shaping student perceptions of their education and their experiences in the business school. The final research question explores organisational space in the business school:

Research question 1.2: How is business school space influenced by the marketisation and commercialisation of management education? How do the features of contemporary business school space influence students and their perceptions of their educational experiences?

The final research question remains in line with the broad research interest in exploration of student perceptions and experiences. The question explores the relation between the changing socio-political conceptions of higher education, the design and the use of business school space, and the student perceptions and experiences.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methodological features of the conducted empirical research. The chapter begins with the philosophical positioning of the study, followed by a discussion on the suitability of ethnography as means of studying organisational and educational contexts. Next, the research design is discussed in detail, starting with the empirical setting of the study, followed by detailed descriptions of the conducted participant observations and interviews. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the analytical methods used to analyse the data.

3.1. Philosophical positioning of the study

Before detailing the features of the methodology utilised in this study, it is necessary to explore the philosophical considerations at the basis of the taken approach. The discussion is divided into two sections. First, ontological considerations of the study will be explored in the context of the reviewed literature and the research questions. The second section is dedicated to the epistemological assumptions that inform the study.

3.1.1. Ontological assumptions of the study

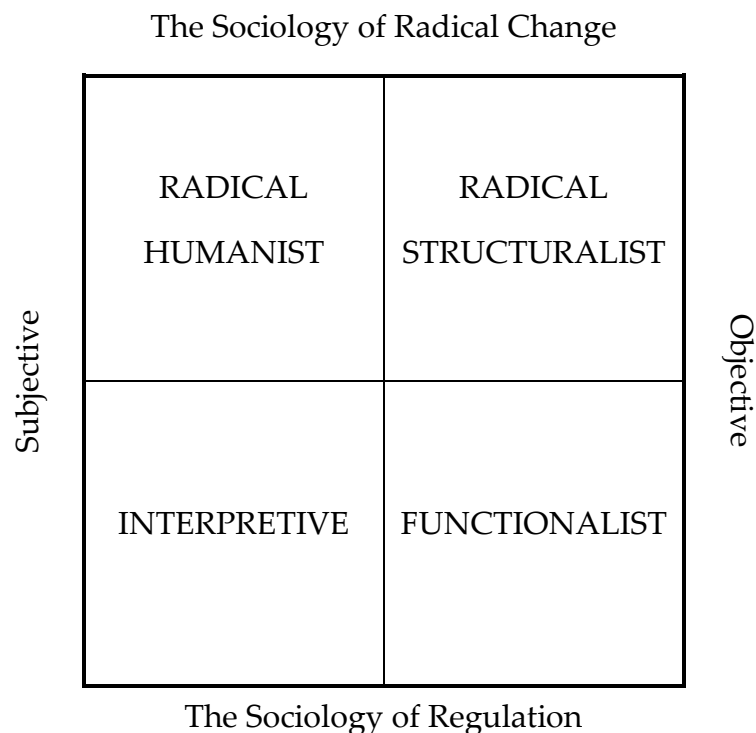
Etymologically, the term ontology originates from modern Latin word 'ontologia', which derives from Greek 'ontos', meaning 'being' or 'existence', and 'logos', meaning 'discourse' or 'doctrine'. It is defined as the study of the assumptions with regards to the existence and nature of being and reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1982). In social sciences context, Richie & Lewis (2003)

suggest three key questions, or assumptions, ontology is concerned with: (1) whether social reality can or cannot exist outside the human understanding and interpretations; (2) whether there are multiple social realities in existence, or there is one shared social reality; and (3) whether social realities are governed by absolute rules that may be observed and be generalised upon. It is, therefore, necessary to explore the ontological assumptions that inform the approach taken in this study.

A good starting point for the discussion on the ontological assumption is to reflect on the key questions about the nature of the study itself, namely what is studied and why (Czarniawska, 2014). The interest in studying higher education emerged against the backdrop of the increasingly functionalist socio-political conceptions of higher education. With the roles and the purposes of higher education gradually reduced to a market transaction between universities and students (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011), the interest is placed on understanding the implications of the new socio-political contexts of higher education by exploring student perceptions and experiences.

At the beginning of the study, important insights regarding the possible ontological assumptions were gained from Burrell & Morgan's two-by-two matrix presented in their book "Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis". In the matrix, presented in Figure 1, the authors provide a simple representation and categorisation of key paradigms in social science research along two axes. The vertical axis represents the distinction between the paradigms in terms of stability and change, and the horizontal axis separates them on the basis of subjective vs objective dichotomy.

Figure 1: Burrell & Morgan's (1982:22) Four Paradigms



Such categorisation results with the formulation of key social research paradigms: (1) functionalist, (2) radical structuralist, (3) interpretive, and (4) radical humanist. Each paradigm is positioned on the matrix based on the underlying ontological assumption regarding the nature and the researcher's position towards the social reality. The objectivist position considers social realities and meanings to exist independent of social actors (Bryman, 2008). This position, traditionally represented in natural sciences and associated with positivism and deductive research, maintains a clear separation between the researcher and the researched social phenomenon. In contrast, the subjectivist, or constructionist, ontological approach asserts that reality is necessarily a result of human agency (Burrell & Morgan, 1982). Studies following this tradition are usually inductive or abductive, and assume the exploration of "multiple constructed realities through the shared investigation (by

researchers and participants) of meanings and explanations” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 12). Furthermore, the paradigm is also defined by whether the interest lies in exploring the social for the benefit of maintaining its cohesiveness (sociology of regulation), or in exploring the alternatives for challenging the current state of affair (Burrell & Morgan, 1982). While the presented paradigms each provide fundamentally different perspectives and approaches to social science research and analysis, Burrell & Morgan, (1982) suggest that the borders between them are analytically separate, but also fluid due to characteristics shared between the neighbouring paradigms.

In an effort to explore the student perceptions of their education and their educational experiences, a subjectivist, or constructionist ontological approach has been adopted in this research. By taking this ontological position, the study considers students to be central to the exploration of the changing roles and the purposes of higher education, and aims to explore the meanings students give to social phenomena surrounding management education, including specialised media rankings and the design and socio-material practices embedded in business school spaces. Such exploration, however, also requires the discussion on the epistemological considerations this study is based on.

3.1.2. Epistemological stance

After detailing the ontological assumptions underlying this study, the following section explores its epistemological considerations. Epistemology is a domain of philosophy that considers what knowledge is, how it is created and how it is disseminated (Hatch & Cunliff, 2006). It considers the fundamental questions on how reality can be known, what knowledge is

based on (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), and how we can understand the world and communicate this understanding to others (Burrell & Morgan, 1982). Epistemology is vital to any scientific inquiry as it defines what is considered as an acceptable knowledge (Bryman, 2008). In this sense, the discussions on epistemological considerations differentiate between positivist, realist, and interpretivist epistemological approaches to research (Bryman, 2008; Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Positivist epistemology represents an approach traditionally dominating natural sciences. This approach focuses on explanations and predictions of the social world through exploring trends and causal relationships between its elements (Burrell & Morgan, 1982). Following this approach, the social world exists independently of the researcher, whose role in the inquiry is objective and value-free (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This means that knowledge is constituted only by facts, or features of the social phenomenon that can be observed by our senses, and recorded (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Realism is an approach in between positivism and interpretivism. It is characterised by the positivist view on the nature of the reality, by which the social reality exists independently from the researcher (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). What makes it close to interpretivism is the understanding that

Our knowledge of the world is always in terms of available descriptions or discourses, and we cannot step outside these to see how our knowledge claims compare to the things to which they refer. It is the experience of the fallibility of our knowledge, of mistaking things and being taken by surprise, that gives us the realist conviction that the world is not merely the product of thought, whether privately or socially 'constructed' (Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004).

In other words, realists agree with interpretivist that the only way to access the social realities is through exploring human interpretations of these

realities. From the realist perspective, social reality cannot *be known* (Bryman, 2008), as it is always mediated by interpretations and understandings. In this sense, the purpose of scientific inquiry is to *know about* the explored social phenomena (Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004).

Due to the highly political nature of the setting (management education) and the participants (students), this study at the first glance seems to be very much in line with Burrell & Morgan's (1982) radical humanist paradigm insofar that it ultimately adds to the academic debates (Ghoshal, 2005; Zell, 2001; Furedi, 2011, among others) in questioning of the "limitations of existing social arrangements" (Burrell & Morgan, 1982: 32) in higher education and management education. At the same time, the research problem is not positioned or perceived necessarily within the realm of critique, as the key consideration of the empirical study of this thesis is to explore and make sense of the student perceptions, experiences and relationships with their educational settings. However, the intention here is not to provide an apolitical account of student perceptions and experiences; literature review suggests many points of interest where the current social arrangements are pervious to critique and, in line with this, the study does not shy away from being rooted in these, at times, critical contexts.

The strict separation between radical humanism and interpretivism in Burrell & Morgan's (1982) model, therefore, seems to be inadequate in the context of this research. The study, however, remains rooted in shared features of both paradigms, more specifically in an interpretivist position. Interpretivism as an epistemological approach has been developed as an antithesis to positivistic approaches to studying social sciences based on the argument that studying people requires different strategies than studying objects (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Researchers following the interpretivist tradition reject the objective

ontological perspective, and explore social phenomena as constructed by the individuals who give subjective meanings to the experiences of the realities surrounding them (Creswell, 2009). In the interpretivist research tradition knowledge is subjective, and assumes the exploration of “subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman, 2008: 16). Researchers, therefore, interpret participants’ interpretations of the social world, and the theorisations result from the subjective interpretations of subjective meanings (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

3.2. Research methods

Following the discussion on the ontological and the epistemological assumptions of the study, this section provides an overview of ethnography as a chosen methodological approach. It details the features of ethnography that make the method suitable for the exploration of the posed research questions. Considering the rich history of ethnographic studies in different contexts and settings, this section focuses mainly on the features of ethnography in organisational and educational contexts.

3.2.1. Ethnography in organisational contexts

Ethnography aims to explore the ways people live; how they behave, act, react, interact and communicate; what values, beliefs, norms, perspectives and motivations they hold (Woods, 1986). Organisational scholars have over the years recognised the suitability of ethnographic (e.g. Kondo, 1990; Kunda, 2006; Orr, 1996; Grimm, 2012; Czarniawska, 1997; Buravoy, 1979), or ethnography-inspired studies (e.g. MacKay & Chia, 2013; Pollock & D’Adderio, 2012) for investigating various aspects of organisational life.

Despite this, organisational ethnographies are often misunderstood as nothing more than subjective and descriptive accounts of organisational contexts, resulting in dubious, ungeneralizable and/or invalid contributions to scientific knowledge (Cunliffe, 2009).

The rejection of ethnography as ‘unscientific’ enough for studying organisations, however, is disputable. As Latour (2008: 136) provocatively asks, “what is so wrong with ‘mere descriptions’?”. The power of ethnography lies precisely in the richness of descriptions and the ‘thickness’ of its narratives (Geertz, 1973). Only through descriptiveness of ethnography we are able to observe “intricate ways individuals and groups understand, accommodate, and resist a presumably shared order” (Van Maanen, 2011: xviii). There is a need, however, to reflect on, and embrace the complexities behind both the ethnographic fieldwork and its reporting. Organisational ethnographers cannot (and should not) be assumed as either passive or objective actors during fieldwork and reporting of the findings. Instead, issues such as researcher power and positionality are in a need of addressing. In a response to these challenges, current debates invite for embedding researcher reflexivity in ethnographic and other qualitative research (Alvesson, 2010; Learmonth, Lockett & Dowd, 2012; Gilmore & Kenny, 2015).

3.2.2. Ethnography in education

Ethnography has a long-standing tradition in education research (see Orth, 1963; Willis, 1974; Nespor, 1994; Zell, 2001; Carspecken & Walford, 2001; Anteby, 2013, among others). Mills & Morton (2012) consider ethnographic research methods vital for investigating individual and institutional contexts of education as a “struggle to make one’s aspirations and desires real”. Willis’

(1974) seminal study in UK high schools in 1960's is a prime example of the importance of engagement in the fieldwork and *in-situ* observations with pupils, in his case to investigate why working class kids get working class jobs.

In higher education, however, "ethnography has been a rarely adopted approach" (Pabian, 2014: 6), with only a handful of studies dedicated to the exploration of student life. Moffatt (1989), for instance, studied undergraduate students using participant observations for 10 years to understand the influences of American culture on student experience. He, however, does not attempt to hide his position as a professor at the investigated college, nor he claims his immersion into the student culture. Instead he argues that "... hanging around with one's subjects for a long enough time [leads to] hearing them in their more natural adolescent tones [and] sensing their own priorities as they understand them" (Moffatt, 1989: xv). A diametrically different approach was taken by Nathan (2005), whose interest was in understanding the student life through student eyes. Her immersion into the student life was complete, as she enrolled to a first year undergraduate programme at the university where she worked as a professor. Facing significant ethical challenges arising from going 'undercover', Nathan chose not only to keep confidentiality of participants and the institution, but also to publish her book under a pseudonym.

Ethnographic studies in management education are even more scarce. Still, notable examples do exist. Ethnographic studies in business schools broadly investigate either students, or the academic and support staff, with a strong focus on the latter groups. Examples of such studies include Zell's (2001) ethnography in a large US business school academic, where she studied the struggle of the academic, support and management staff against commercialisation of their school. Gehman, Trevino & Garud (2013) used

ethnography-inspired methodology to investigate the complexities surrounding the shifts in ways value is understood in a business school context. A recent study by Anteby (2013) is a rare example of an auto-ethnographic study in a business school context. Here, Anteby investigated academic practices and the nurture of organisational silence through rich and compelling auto-ethnographic narratives and reflections on his position as a member of academic staff at Harvard Business School.

While such studies provide valuable insights into organisational lives of business schools, comparatively little studies focus on students as organisational members holding a unique, but critical position in business schools. One such study is Nespor's (1994) ethnographic research in schools of physics and management in the US, which considered learning as a social activity that is influenced by spatial, material and temporal characteristics of the education institutions in early 1980s. In his study, physics and management are perceived as separate realms of social life that employ different educational and learning practices in support of the development of their aspiring members. Nespor's methodological approach, however, is casually discussed in his work. Little effort was given to reflections on his positionality; instead, it is assumed, thus remaining fairly unproblematic.

In contrast, Orth's (1963) ethnographic exploration of the culture and social structures created by postgraduate students at Harvard Business School explicitly recognises the importance of reflexivity in his study. Apart from uncovering the nuances of the social structures and practices in top US business school in a post-World War II context, Orth's study also provides a suitable narrative to draw from when problematizing the specific issues ethnographers in educational contexts face in terms of building rapport,

managing multiple roles, and power dynamics between the researcher and the student participants.

The reviewed literature and the examples of ethnographic works provide insights into, at times different, research processes and challenges. All ethnographies, however, share similar characteristics and requirements, such as the necessity for the researcher to immerse into the studied group, build rapport with members of the group, and generally make a significant personal and professional investment. In the following section these characteristics will be discussed in details in the specific context of business and management education.

3.2.3. Doing ethnographic research

Conducting any type of ethnography is a challenging task. In contrast to most other approaches, ethnographic exploration requires researchers to personally step in the studied context, as they need to be there, in the field, and be immersed into the group they investigate. Such immersion requires researchers to join the group with an open and inquisitive mind, and be tenacious in their efforts to build rapport and expect the unexpected. It also requires them to be reflexive not only of their experiences, but also of the influences of their presence on the group.

Ethnographic research has a potential to lead to significant dilemmas in terms of the consequences of the researchers' activities and choices in publishing and disseminating their research. Van der Geest's (2003) dilemma is a prime example. In his work, he investigated very sensitive cultural practices – witchcraft and abortion – in a Ghanaian community. To protect his informants, Van der Geest published his work under a pseudonym and limited the

community access to his writings in order to protect his informants from being identified. Over time, however, his participants expressed dissatisfaction with his decision as they took pride in being a part of the study. Taking extreme measures such as publishing under a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality, however, in many cases seems to be unsuccessful. Similar to Van der Geest (2003), Nathan (2005) also put significant efforts to maintain anonymity of her participants and the institution, including publishing her book under a pseudonym. However, her identity, as well as the location of the study, was soon identified by the analysis of the clues found in her book (Pabian, 2014).

Compared to anthropologists such as Malinowski (2005), who investigated Kula, a trading system in the South Sea Islands, or Osburg (2013), who investigated the criminal underground in China, organisational ethnographers are usually familiar with the basic social rules and the language of the researched setting and are, therefore, not necessarily perceived as foreigners by organisational members. In this sense, studies in organisations and institutions (e.g. Kunda, 2006; Orr, 1996), are very different from, for instance, High's (2008) research on illegal gold mining in Mongolia, which required significant time to learn the language and the rules of the illegal mining community before conducting the study.

While possessing basic knowledge of language, as well as the rules and behaviours of the field of study may be of a significant benefit, it may also compromise the researcher's ability to explore social practices that are different, implicit, or counter-intuitive. In education research, the familiarity and the closeness to the field and its members is particularly evident and potentially responsible for little ethnographic research. As Orth (1963: ix) argues:

Perhaps one reason there have been relatively few such studies heretofore is that the researcher is inevitably placed in a somewhat difficult position. Assuming that he is himself and educator, he recognizes quickly that his own assumptive world must be the first target of his inquiry. If he is to ask the kinds of questions which will lead to a fruitful investigation, he must, temporarily at least, be acultural in his approach. Particularly when he is a member of the institution he is investigating [...] he must suspend institutional and personal loyalties during that period when his senses are accumulating data and later when he turns his mind to the task of understanding the implications of the data he has gathered.

Being an academic and studying students is, then, in many ways similar to investigating our own 'backyard'. Relying on our experience, we expect to know what can be found in the field. The immersion into the examined culture is in many ways already assumed – it is reasonable to consider that researchers even might believe they have more insights into the topic than their participants. Orth's idea of an 'acultural' researcher, however, is prone to criticism, as ethnographers cannot, and should not, consider themselves in any way capable of being acultural in their field work. A convincing account should instead identify, critically examine, carefully balance, and truthfully report tensions between institutional, pedagogical, and any other roles researchers may assume in the specific research context.

Finally, most ethnographic research requires a time-consuming engagement with the field of research. The knowledge of basic social rules and practices, and language could expedite the research process, but can also impede the ability of the researcher to build rapport with the participants, which is a key requirement of any ethnographic fieldwork. Regardless, in most cases the ethnographic fieldwork is a lengthy process: Malinowski (2005) spent two years doing his fieldwork, High (2008) spent 20 months in Mongolia, Nespor's (1994) investigation took 13 months. Organisational ethnography relies on

researchers spending their time to capture not only the temporally fixed moments in lives of the participants, but the fluidity and messiness of organisational lives from which patterns of behaviours and practices emerge. Today's trends in business and management research, where academic worth is correlated with the number of publications in top rated journals (Ghoshal, 2005; Knights & Clarke, 2014), discourage researchers from investing their time in the time-consuming process of ethnographic research.

3.3. Research strategy and design

After discussing the philosophical grounding of the study and the choice of ethnography as a method of empirical investigation, this section examines the strategic and design choices made in this study. First, the chosen empirical setting for the study will be discussed, followed by key strategies and issues surrounding participant observations. Next, pilot interviews and interviews with participants are discussed. The section concludes with the description of the data analysis process.

3.3.1. The setting of the empirical study

The focus of the empirical study was placed on a single cohort in one business school over a period of one academic year. While such design inevitably has limitations, it also provides a unique insight into a postgraduate business student cohort, and the individual changes resulting from their interaction with their institution, peers and the wider educational environment. The study could have followed students outside of the business school to gain understanding of the socialisation processes involved (see Nathan, 2005), or focus on multiple cohorts over extended periods of time (see Moffatt, 2000).

Such research strategies, however, would either have limited success in answering the research questions, or would be unfeasible in the context of the doctoral research.

The posed research questions required a choice of a business school with institutional and organisational characteristics and practices that reflect contemporary challenges facing higher education in the wake of marketization and commercialisation. It was required that the business school draws its reputation and image from both the traditional sources and the recently developed market mechanisms (Gioia & Corley, 2002). While a large (and increasing) number of UK business schools fit the requirements, it was also important to be able to gain access to students.

The final choice was made to conduct the research in a very reputable UK business school³, coded as Top Tier Business School (TTBS from now on). Regularly ranked in various league tables, TTBS is a part of a Russell group university with traditionally strong international reputation, highly ranked in global university rankings. TTBS itself is medium-sized, with around 100 academic staff teaching around 1000 undergraduate students, around 600 postgraduate taught and MBA students, as well as over 100 PhD students. The educational process is assisted by support staff, whose number is approaching a ratio of 1:1 compared to the number of academic staff.

In recent years, TTBS has become one of less than a hundred triple accredited (MBA Today, 2017) business schools in the world, simultaneously holding accreditation from three recognised accreditation agencies, AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS. By holding a 'triple crown' accreditation, the school is purposefully

³ The details presented in this section are approximations sourced from official documents and informal discussions with the staff. Due to the need for maintaining confidentiality, specific sources of the data will not be disclosed.

positioned as the market leader in providing education in line with best practices in the sector. While a wide range of undergraduate programmes host more than two thirds of total students enrolled, the strategic focus of TTBS remains on the development of a diverse MSc programmes' portfolio, as well as MBA and Executive MBA programmes. Over the past several years, the number of programmes on offer reached 13, with more programmes being developed and rolled out in the next few years. In terms of tuition fees for their postgraduate Management programme, TTBS is placed a bit above average for UK/EU students, and a bit more below average for international applicants⁴. Also, tuition fees are increasing steadily on an annual basis.

At the same time, TTBS is organisationally embedded within a broader organisational context of the University and the College it is a part of. While maintaining institutional independence in terms of PGT recruitment and administrative support, the School's budget and strategy decisions are made in liaison with the College. Informal conversations with staff members suggest two different perspectives on the relationship between TTBS and the University. Some members of staff argue that it is damaging for TTBS, as the decision-making process involves the individuals who are not necessarily aware of the specific challenges existing in management education. Furthermore, concerns were raised in relation to the financial relationship between TTBS and the University, by which a tranche of tuition fees are kept by the University for maintenance and investments. Others argue that the relationship is more of a symbiotic one in a way that the reputational value of the university largely maintains the reputational value of TTBS as one of the most desirable business schools on the market and it is, therefore, reasonable to financially support the University. There is also a type of collegial support

⁴ For more details see Appendix A.

seen among some academic staff (particularly the ones from sociological backgrounds) who, concerned with the impact of marketization and commercialisation on humanities and social sciences, felt that TTBS should be supporting these segments of the University as well.

3.3.2. Research participants

The main participants in the study were 59 students enrolled on the MSc in Management programme in the academic year 2014/2015. 90% of the enrolled students were international, representing 19 countries worldwide. The largest proportion of enrolled students came from China (32%), followed by Germany (17%). In terms of age, students ranged from 21 to 29, averaging at 24 years of age. In terms of gender, the cohort was predominately female, with 39 female students and 20 male students. Students came from various academic backgrounds, including philosophy, languages, education, journalism, engineering and biology, with only around 20% of students with an academic background in business or economics. Also, some of the students had professional experience before joining the programme in various industries and jobs.

3.3.3. Participant observations

The first phase of the data collection process involved extensive informal interviewing, as well as participant observations. Informal interviewing was used mainly in the initial stages of data collection, but also throughout the process due to its suitability as

the method of choice at the beginning for participant observation fieldwork, when you're settling in. It is also used throughout

ethnographic fieldwork to build greater rapport and to uncover new topics of interest that might have been overlooked (Bernard, 2006: 211)

Informal interviews were very useful throughout the process, and particularly so in the first weeks of observations when building rapport with the cohort was crucial, as discussed in the later parts of this section. During participant observations, the researcher immersed himself into the studied context mainly by observing individuals and their everyday activities (Bryman, 1989). Being very much aware that observations largely rely on impression management and deception of the participants (Bernard, 2006), the researcher decided that there is little reason to act covertly (Bryman, 1989) in this empirical context. The researcher was, therefore, honest about the nature and the type of the research he was conducting, both with TTBS and with the participants.

Observations took place over a period of one academic year, capturing almost the entire educational process of a one-year MSc programme. Data collection began in the first week of the programme, in September 2014, and ended with the end of the taught part of the educational process in June 2015. The only part that was not captured was the dissertation process, as most students by that time either returned to their home countries, travelled for data collection, or worked from home or the Library. This meant that it became increasingly difficult to maintain closeness to the students. In the following sections, the process of observations will be explored in the context of data recording, the challenges of gaining access to the field and the participants, the challenges and the importance of building rapport, and the reflections on the data collection process.

3.3.3.1. Data Recording

Informal interviews and participant observations are notoriously difficult methods of data collection due to the researcher's inability to record the data as the activities unfold (Bernard, 2006). The researcher, therefore, utilised new technologies to gather data more efficiently. Instead of walking around with a pen and a notebook, the researcher used his large screen mobile phone or a tablet, as such devices are very usual among the participants' age group. An important element was the researcher's awareness of the mobile phone use culture among the observed demographics, characterised by the constant and unlimited use of mobile phone for text messaging even in social situations. The researcher was, therefore, able to jot down notes about the activities, discussions and observations as they unfolded, followed by a longer and more detailed descriptions usually during the evenings. The notes taken during the observations consist of a large collection of field notes, containing detailed descriptions of the observed activities, and the researcher's diary, containing researcher's personal views, initial analyses and other important data. Again, the researcher relied on new technologies to efficiently record the data, by placing the field notes in the body of the Word document, and using the Review/Comment tool to keep a researcher's diary. This way, the field notes were followed by the diary inputs, making it easier to follow how, where and why certain assumptions, views, or analyses emerged.

3.3.3.2. Gaining access to the field and the participants

The preparation for the ethnographic study in TTBS lasted more than six months. Apart from the ethical clearance, the successful fieldwork required both individual and institutional access from TTBS. The design of the study

was grounded in the conception of student role as being complex, fragile and transformative, and the study was consequentially considered as acceptable by the ethics board of the researcher's home university. However, soon after requesting access to the MSc in Management cohort and the TTBS educational and social spaces, concerns were raised by key institutional gatekeepers. It was soon clear that issues were not arising from the ethical or other methodological concerns, but from the institutional ones. Interestingly, the concerns were raised from the TTBS' position as a service provider, the very issue the study aimed to investigate. The questions raised were broadly concerned with whether the experience of being studied would potentially have negative consequences of student reports on their satisfaction and, consequentially, on the image of the school.

These concerns, particularly the ones on safekeeping the image of TTBS, were to an extent resolved by a confidentiality agreement that prohibits the use of the institution's name, logo, and any other visual data in academic or any other reports of the findings from the study. The concerns surrounding students and their satisfaction as influenced by the study, however, could not be resolved easily. Eventually, after additional discussions and assurances that students would be approached with great care and to the highest ethical standards, access to the cohort was finally granted.

The inability to use visual data presented a significant challenge for the study. As Pabian (2014:11) argues when discussing similar challenges facing Tuchman's (2009) study, not being able to present visual data "reduced the possibility to analyse, e.g. university buildings and spaces". In our case, however, the researcher was allowed to collect visual data, but was unable to use it in reporting the findings. Instead, the researcher decided to rely on rich descriptions of the spaces, at the same time carefully maintaining

confidentiality. Still, the lack of visual data remains a limitation of the study particularly in the context of the third research question that relates to the influences of marketisation and commercialisation on the business school space, as well as the student relationship with the business school space.

After institutional access was granted, further work was needed in terms of gaining access to a classroom environment for additional non-participatory observations from academic staff teaching on the courses. Here, questions were raised by the lecturers regarding the confidentiality, along with the request for very precise descriptions of what would be observed there. As TTBS staff, they were concerned that their participation in the study might result in the ethnographic assessment of their classroom practices. Their concerns were themselves illustrative of the performance culture often found in contemporary business schools. They were assured that their work will not be in any way scrutinised, and that the observations aim to provide insights into the classroom dynamics not only between students and staff, but also within the student cohort. Access was soon granted by two lecturers who expressed significant interest in the study.

After attaining institutional access to the cohort, formal and informal spaces, and the classrooms, it was also necessary to obtain participation from students. The agreement with TTBS, however, did not include access to any means of communication – including mailing lists – with students. Using formal channels of communication was seen as potentially harmful for both the institution and the students as only formal information was communicated in this way. Access could be granted only when students began their studies, when the researcher would meet the cohort in person. With considerable help from programme directors who, after their concerns were resolved, provided significant support to the project, the formal introduction of the study to

students took place only a day after the formal beginning of the semester. After a brief presentation of the research, students were invited to raise any questions and concerns, and to voice their eventual disagreement with being a part of the study. The asked questions suggested that students showed interest in the study and the entire cohort agreed to be a part of the observations. With this final access granted, the data collection process could formally begin.

3.3.3.3. Building rapport

During the first months of data collection the primary concern was to build rapport with students. Contrary to studies in most other organisational contexts where participants tend to already be a part of the organisational life, the participants took their role in the study as outsiders at first. Observations during the first weeks were characterised by the messiness, uncertainty, happiness and worry that complemented the change in their organisational status from outsiders to student insiders. Building rapport during such a transformative period proved to be very difficult. Fortunately, during the institutional access negotiations, the researcher was provided with an opportunity to engage with the cohort as a teaching assistant on a compulsory zero-credit course. While there was a concern that such engagement could potentially create unfavourable power relations between the researcher and the participants, it was also considered an excellent opportunity for *in-situ* observations and building rapport in periods before and after the tutorials. Eventually, the researcher decided to take advantage of the opportunity, although it also had an impact on the data collection process in terms of postponing interviews with students until Semester 2.

When reflecting on the successes in building rapport in the initial months of data collection, it is important to emphasise the personal, professional and cultural characteristics of the researcher conducting the data collection. As previously mentioned, the student cohort was comprised mainly of international participants aged between 21 and 29, and coming from various personal, professional and cultural backgrounds. In the first weeks, many students found themselves not only in a new organisational and educational environment, but also a socio-political and a cultural one. The researcher was also an international student, close to the participants in terms of age, and with similar academic trajectory and professional background. Furthermore, students also perceived the researcher as a knowledgeable organisational member who held valuable information that would help students stabilise their position in the organisation and, thus, alleviate their fears and uncertainties arising from being immersed in new environments.

Towards the end of Semester 1, as the students routinized and stabilised their position, less and less support was required from the researcher. With the end of the zero-credit course, the researcher's position became slightly simpler. Coming from a white European background, building rapport was easier with students from similar cultural backgrounds, particularly with students from Europe and the Americas. Much effort and focus was put on building stronger rapport with students from Asia, resulting in partial success, particularly with students from Malaysia, India and Taiwan. Over time students began opening up to the idea of having a researcher as a member of the community. Towards the end of Semester 1 most times with students were spent in informal settings, having chats not only about their projects and studies, but also about their experiences, concerns and future plans.

3.3.3.4. Reflections on participant observations

After the first several months, as students routinized into their course activities, the process of data collection routinized as well. The issues with positionality seemed to be less apparent than before, until the discussion the researcher witnessed in late November, almost three months after the beginning of the observations. It was the week when students were required to submit their first essays and the cohort was tense. For most students this would be a first experience with assessment in the UK environment, and their uncertainty was palpable. The essay students needed to submit was a result of their work in groups of four to six students and there were some concerns already raised by the students during the semester regarding the dynamics in certain groups.

Only several days before the submission the researcher encountered Emma and Mia⁵, two students working in the one of the groups. Emma was crying, and Mia was trying to comfort her. Initially hesitant, the students shared the issues they had with other group members. Specifically, one male student was downplaying their roles in the group. When confronted by Emma, he acted dismissive and hurtful towards her academic abilities and language skills. Emma's distress was indicative of the conflicting roles she assumed. As a student, whose learning experience was hoped to result in a favourable assessment result, Emma was offended when her educational capabilities were questioned. In terms of professional conduct, she was frustrated with the situation and her position in the team, and specifically with the unprofessional behaviour of her team member. Interestingly, her position as a consumer, which was clearly assumed in interviews and other interactions, did not

⁵ All participants were coded under a pseudonym based on the most popular names in their respective countries. For more details see page 96.

manifest here. When discussing the incident, Emma neither stated nor insinuated that practices in TTBS were in any way responsible for the situation. Although the incident had little consequences on subsequent interactions (Emma was merely venting her frustration with the situation that was resolved in a few days' time), the question of the researcher's conflicting roles emerged again. Over the course of participant observations and the interview process there were other similar situations where different researcher's roles were in conflict. Reflecting on these and other events had a significant influence on researcher's actions and, ultimately, their diffusion.

Ethnographers inevitably hold significant power over ways they collect and interpret data, and report the results. As previously stated, recent debates suggest reflexivity as a way of overcoming such issues (Alvesson, 2010; Learmonth, Lockett & Dowd, 2012; Gilmore & Kenny, 2015). Reflexivity is particularly required during the fieldwork as the uniqueness of the setting and the participants' position as organisational members of business schools leads to a unique blend of ethnographer's positions. As Orth (1963) rightfully observes, studies among students are conducted by researchers that are educators and, in most cases, members of the institutions they investigate. Organisational ethnographers wishing to study educational contexts therefore need to, perhaps even more than in other contexts, be reflexive of the positions they hold.

When discussing his study, Kunda (2006: vii) remarks,

Unlike many [ethnographic] voyages of this sort, [...] it did not take me to the peripheries of empires or the edges of civilization, nor even to the marginal "others" closer to home, but in the opposite direction—to the metropolis, to the center...

Furthering Kunda's observation, ethnography in higher education contexts requires researchers not only to look closer to home, but to investigate their own 'backyard'. In this case, the researcher was the 'insider', and the participants were in the process of transition from being the 'outsiders' at first, towards being the 'insiders' in the later stages of the educational process. While such position is very much beneficial for building rapport as participants are likely to engage the researcher as a knowledgeable insider, it also brings particular challenges arising from potentially conflicting researcher's positions. Issues arising from the power the researcher holds over the ways the study is conducted, analysed and disseminated (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015) are here complemented by a separate, context specific set of power relations between the researcher and students.

These relations emerge from the traditionally superior position of researchers as educators and pedagogues, and the traditionally inferior position of students as learners. As pedagogues, researchers hold explicit and implicit responsibilities for the student development that surpass the pure academic context. Similarly, in contexts where ethnographers are also members of the institution (Orth, 1963; Nathan, 2005), power issues may occur from researchers being permanent, and students being temporary members. In this case, the researcher was intimately familiar with the culture and the language of the institution and the fieldwork. Drawing from the literature and the gathered experiences, three context-specific power relations encountered during the observations are identified:

Pedagogue vs learner. Specific to educational contexts, this power relation not only positions researchers in a dominant power position over their participants, but also assumes the relation of responsibility of researcher-pedagogue towards students. This relation requires a thoughtful reflection

due to its potentially negative influence on building rapport and managing sensitive situations during the fieldwork.

Permanent vs temporary organisational member. In contrast to most organisational contexts, ethnographers in the business school context are typically permanent organisational members⁶, while the students⁷ hold a position of organisational members with a temporary tenure in the organisation. As senior members, researchers hold a potentially highly influential and formative position in relation to students who hold their position both within and on the outside of the organisation.

Service provider vs consumer. This power relation is particularly significant in management education contexts as the processes of commercialisation and commodification seem to be most evident there. As consumers, students are placed outside the organisation; they hold the superior position over researchers, particularly if researchers are members of the researched institution. Even if this is not the case, significant institutional challenges may still emerge from this power relation, including difficulties with access, confidentiality and reporting.

To conclude, participant observations remain the most challenging and at the same time the most informative element of the conducted empirical research. The influence of observations and informal interviews on the study extended beyond the collected data, as it proved to be key to studying students in two ways. First, the researcher was able to build a strong rapport with the participants and the studied environment, which would not be possible to

⁶ In most reviewed cases, ethnographers were employed in the researched institutions (e.g. Orth, 1963; Nespor, 1994; Anteby, 2013). Even if not employed, ethnographers studying business education tend to be members of the business and management research and education community.

⁷ Particularly on one-year postgraduate programmes common in the UK.

achieve without the complete immersion into the researched context. Second, observations and informal interviews proved to be invaluable to the researcher's understanding of the studied context, thus leaving a significant mark on the subsequent data collection through interviewing.

3.3.4. Interview process

The decision to include interviews as a part of the data collection process was made very early during the development of the project. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the lack of similar research designs in management education studies, it was decided to develop the interview schedule based around the experiences gained through participant observations. This also meant that the interview questions were in constant development during Semester 1, and were required to be piloted.

3.3.4.1. Pilot interviews

Early in the process of the development of the interview strategy it was decided that the pilot interviews could be used not only to test out the interview questions, but also to explore the student perceptions of their educational experience outside of the business school. This way, pilot interviews could serve an important part in the discussion with implications wider than the business school context. A total of 12 participants were interviewed as a part of the pilot interviews, all studying at the same university, but on different programmes: Sociology, International Relations and Law. A group interview method was used in this case as "a form of unstructured interview [...] with more than one subject (Bryman, 2004: 49). Such method was previously used in educational research (Willis, 1974) and

for gathering participant experiences (Bryman, 2004). The group interview method allowed not only to gather the data on the student experiences in other schools, but also it allowed a discussion on the suitability of questions, as participants provided various interpretations of the questions in an informative and constructive discussion. Although group interview data was not directly used in the findings of this thesis, the data gathered was an important part of the refining of the questions and has informed the interview process both in terms of clarifications and in terms of the researcher's attitudes and behaviour during the interview process.

3.3.4.2. Interviews with participants

A critical moment in the data collection was the interviewing of the participants in Semester 2. As mentioned in the previous section, building rapport was an important process that resulted with a successful purposeful selection of 20 students for the interviews. Here, the researcher attempted to strike a balance between including key participants identified during observations, and including participants from both genders, and coming from different socio-cultural backgrounds.

As can be seen in Table 2, the sample follows the international structure of the programme, with 11 nationalities from all over the world represented. In terms of gender structure, the sample also follows the trends in postgraduate education in TTBS, with more females represented (14 females and 6 males). The key limitation of the sample is the number of participants coming from China, with only two students willing to participate in interviews. In total, 35 students were asked to participate, and 20 students decided to do so. At first, the participants were given a generic code (P1 – P20). As the data collection and analysis continued, it became increasingly important to provide students

and their narratives with pseudonyms. It was eventually decided to use the lists of most popular baby names in respective countries to source pseudonyms.

Table 2: List of interview participants

Code	Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender
P1	Emma	Germany	Female
P2	Chiara	Luxembourg	Female
P3	Ciaran	UK	Male
P4	Mia	Germany	Female
P5	Savina	Cyprus	Female
P6	Wang Fang	China	Female
P7	Francesco	Italy	Male
P8	Paul	Germany	Male
P9	Aarav	India	Male
P10	Nora	Norway	Female
P11	Lukas	Germany	Male
P12	Lin	Taiwan	Female
P13	Julia	Brazil	Female
P14	Anaya	India	Female
P15	Chen	Taiwan	Female
P16	Aulia	Indonesia	Female
P17	Hanna	Germany	Female
P18	Patrick	UK	Male
P19	Li Yan	China	Female
P20	Sofia	Germany	Female

The interview process consisted of twenty semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants over a period of five months (February 2014 – June 2014). The semi-structured method of interviewing was utilised due to the exploratory nature of the study on the one hand, and the necessity to collect fairly structured data (Bernard, 2006), on the other. Loosely structured, open-ended interview questions (Bryman, 1989) were included in the

interview schedule⁸ (Bernard, 2006), and were used to lead the conversation. The questions were broadly separated into questions about the student experiences before and during their studies, as well as some questions with regards to what they expect their future to look like. An additional subset of questions, created to explore the experiences of rankings, was utilised only if the student led the discussion towards that topic, and this was the case in a large majority of conducted interviews.

The interviews were all conducted face-to-face, and in TTBS' facilities. Individual and group bookable learning spaces were chosen as the suitable environments, as they provided the necessary privacy (only the researcher and the participant were present in the rooms), and maintained confidentiality. On average, interviews took around 1 hour and 15 minutes each. Most interviews were followed by an informal conversation on the topic and the questions, as well as additional points and clarifications that students were not necessarily willing to share on the recording. The quality and the depth of most data collected during the interviews reflects a strong rapport built with the participants. Participant observations and informal interviews allowed the participants to familiarise themselves with the researcher and the topic. As a result, most participants felt comfortable speaking honestly about their experiences, sharing some very sensitive information ranging from very negative comments on specific members of staff, to at times openly racist and misogynist comments and narratives about their peers and their environment.

⁸ The full interview schedule is presented in Appendix D.

3.3.4.3. Reflections on the interview process

While the interview questions were carefully crafted and piloted to avoid student distress, the mere dialogue about the participants' educational choices, their experiences and their future has made them think about these topics, resulting with, in some cases, significant emotional distress.

Following the rules of ethical empirical research, the researcher made it clear in the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix C) that the participants are free to not answer specific questions, as well as to discontinue their participation if they feel so. Following this, in situations when participants became emotionally invested in the conversation the researcher felt it was necessary to offer to stop the interview. All participants, however, chose to continue until the end of the interview.

The most specific example of the emotional distress of the participant was the case of Savina, a female student from Cyprus. When discussing why she made the choice of TTBS and what she feels studying is all about, Savina suddenly burst into tears. After taking a short break and insisting to continue with the interview, she stated that her emotional response was related to the fact that, when she hears herself talking about her education in this structured way, she is not convinced that she made the right choices, making her anxious about her future.

This, and similar, situations occurring during the interview process have strengthened the researcher's focus on students even more than before. Spending time with the students and interviewing them about their education has exposed them not as outcome-driven, decisive and resolute individuals; instead, the researcher has increasingly seen them as young people who have so much invested in their education that they are afraid to state and, therefore,

admit to themselves that they are dissatisfied or unhappy with some elements of the process. It must be noted that in this context the word investment does not necessarily mean the financial aspect of student experience. Instead, it denotes all the personal sacrifices (relationships, family, etc.) students needed to make when moving to another country, as well as the burden of trust and expectations most students felt coming from their families as their key funders.

The emergence of such situations during interviews is assumed to be related to an excellent rapport built with some of the participants. The closeness of the researcher to his participants and the resulting sincerity while discussing participant experiences has triggered the emotional response on the one hand, and enabled the researcher as a person of trust to diffuse the situation on the other.

3.3.5. Data Analysis

Following the previous sections, this section details the process of data organisation and analysis. The data collection process resulted with a large amount of recordings, texts, public and proprietary documents, website transcripts, and visual data. In line with the exploratory nature of the study that required continuous analysis of the data, its efficient organisation was vital. All data – textual, audio, and visual – were kept on a secured University server under password protection to minimise the possibility of security breach, or loss of data. For additional security against the loss of data, key documents were also kept in a physical form in a locked place only accessible to the researcher.

An effort was made to transcribe most recordings immediately upon the data collection. This allowed the researcher to immediately engage with the data,

and reflect on the researcher's impressions gained during the interview process. The transcription process also allowed the researcher to examine and contrast the data, and identify points of interest for further data collection, while at the same time familiarising himself with the collected data (Bryman, 2008). All data, apart from the visual, were uploaded into a qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10 for easier management and analysis.

The exploratory nature of the research questions, coupled with the messiness arising from using multiple methods of data collection in phases, required an abductive approach to data analysis (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Here, Czarniawska's (2014: 24) point was followed, as she argues that abduction follows a 'logic of discovery': "Instead of amassing 'data', from which a theory can be 'induced', [...] it moves from the field to the desk and back, step-by-step..."

Reflecting on the process of data collection conducted for this doctoral research, its phases – observations and informal interviewing in the first phase, with continuous observations and semi-structured interviewing in the second phase – suggest that the analysis was indeed conducted by constantly moving between the field and the desk, making sense of data and its relationship with the literature immediately upon its collection, thus continuously informing the ongoing data collection process. Furthermore, this approach allowed the researcher to chronologically follow students from their induction to the completion of their programme in order to capture the emergence and changes in patterns and the emergence of themes over time (Czarniawska, 2014). The process of data analysis can be roughly divided in three distinctive parts, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Phases of data analysis

Activity	Intended outcomes	Achieved outcomes
Analysis of data from informal interviews and observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of themes and relationships • Building the semi-structured interview guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations of student experiences • Emergence of key themes for exploration during the interview process
Analysis of the interview data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring student views on the observed themes and relationships • Emergence of new, unexplored themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct accounts of student experience • Relationships with observational data
Additional analysis of the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation between observational and interview data • Development of overarching themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis as presented in the findings chapters

3.3.5.1. Analysis of the observational data

In the months following the beginning of data collection, observations and informal interviews have already generated substantive amount of textual, audio and visual data. The researcher utilised thematic analysis (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman 2007; Bryman, 2008) to explore the data. In this phase, the researcher relied on multiple readings of field notes and the researcher's diary, using multiple coloured pens and post-it notes to gradually begin to make sense of the data. Certain themes emerging from the data, most notably the importance of space in student everyday lives, and the relatively little interest in specialised rankings, were flagged during this process for further exploration. Such analysis continued throughout the data collection process, and some of the data was repeatedly revisited as new themes emerged. This initial analysis was also extremely helpful in conceptualising the interview

guide, as well as in providing a guidance to further observations and informal communications with the participants.

3.3.5.2. Coding of the interview data

The process of analysing interview data was very much informed by the analysis conducted in the first phase of data analysis. Individual transcripts were analysed in a way that allowed the meanings to emerge from the data itself (Silverman, 1994). As the interviews were transcribed, initially analysed and used already during the data collection process, the researcher was familiar with most data prior to the beginning of the coding process. A two-stage coding process (Bryman, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 1990) was conducted in NVivo 10. First, initial codes were developed through the process of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) of key interviews, by which the codes reflected specific points of interest, made by the participants. Next, the codes were repeatedly reviewed in light of the analysis of observation data, and discussed with the supervisory team until the coding sheet was developed. After coding the data following the coding sheet, the second stage of the coding process involved the categorisation of the coded data into core categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Bruscalioni, 2016). The coding process was supported by the writing up of the findings and, particularly in the last stage of the coding process, with contextualising the findings within the academic literature.

3.3.5.3. Additional analysis of data and triangulation

After the end of the data collection and analysis processes, some of the key themes that emerged from the data required the researcher to revisit and refine the analysis. This was particularly the case with the themes of the importance of organisational space in the student experience and conceptualisation of

their education, and the refinement of three dominant conceptualisations of their experience: learning, working and consumption. The additional coding was conducted by expanding the codes within a selection of clusters that relate to the mentioned themes, again using NVivo 10. This phase was also used to further triangulate between data gathered through observations and informal interviews, and the data gathered through semi-structured interviews. The process of triangulation assumes the collection of data using multiple sources – interviews, observations and documents – to provide multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1978). Through this process, data can be combined “... to make better sense of the other” (Dingwall in Silverman, 1994).

As previously mentioned, the analysis was complemented by the continuous writing and development of the narratives surrounding key themes arising from student accounts, observations, and informal interviews. Considering the continual data collection and analysis processes, and the transformations of student perceptions and experiences over the period of the academic year, these narratives were constantly updated and reworked, each time with more relations between themes and theoretical issues. The evolution of the narratives is captured in multiple conference papers presented on workshops and conferences in front of different audiences in the fields of management, social sciences, and education. The engagement with different audiences not only resulted in the constructive criticism and aid with formulating the existing theoretical and empirical points of the study, but also opened up the researcher to new avenues for interpretation and theoretical situation of the analysis.

3.4. Conclusion

This section described the features of the conducted empirical research. It began by providing insights into the philosophical considerations and positioning for the study. Here, the discussion on the ontological and the epistemological concerns was situated around Burrell & Morgan's (1982) two-by-two matrix outlining four paradigms of social science research. In line with its aims laid out in the research questions, the study assumed a constructionist ontological position by which social reality is constructed from human interpretations and understanding of the world (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In terms of its aim at stabilising or changing the current state of affairs (Burrell & Morgan, 1982), the study is dedicated to the exploration of student perceptions and experiences in current educational contexts. From this stance, the study is not necessarily aiming towards change, but does acknowledge its potential for critique. Epistemologically, the thesis is situated within the interpretivist approach, by which the knowledge is created from the subjective perceptions of the social (Bryman, 2008). In contrast to research following the positivist epistemological stance, knowledge results from the researcher's interpretations of the participants' interpretations and constructions of the social world.

The next section explored ethnography as a chosen research method. The section began with the discussion on the key features of ethnographic research in organisational contexts, followed by the discussion on the important role ethnography plays in educational research. This was followed by a discussion on what doing ethnographic research entails, with an emphasis on the role of confidentiality and time in the field in the research, as well as the importance

of understanding the social, political and cultural context in which the field work takes place.

The following section shifted the focus back on the empirical study conducted as a part of this doctoral thesis by discussing its research strategy and design. The first part was dedicated to introducing key participants and the business school in which the research took place. Next, the section discussed the conducted participant observations and its features. Here, the discussion first discussed the technical features of the conducted data collection, such as techniques for data recording. This was followed by a discussion on the issues encountered when gaining access to the field and the participants. Key challenges in gaining access to the research field were related to the institutional concerns regarding confidentiality and potential harm for the organisational image. The nature of student position as outsiders at first, and their perception of the researcher as the insider to the school, resulted in significant, but resolvable, challenges in building rapport with students as participants. The final part of the section was dedicated to detailed reflections on participant observations and the context-specific challenges encountered in the fieldwork. Next, the choice of semi-structured interviews for data collection was discussed, with detailed descriptions of the conducted interviews and pilot group interviews, and the reflections on the interview process.

The final section was dedicated to the data analysis process. First, ways of organising data were described. Next, the abductive approach to data analysis was introduced as a constant move between the data collection in the field, and data analysis (Czarniawska, 2014). Following this approach, three phases of data analysis were described in detail. First, data gathered through participant observations and informal interviews was continually analysed as

it was gathered, to inform the following visit to the field. In the second phase, interviews were coded in a two-step process. First, interviews were transcribed immediately upon data collection. The process of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilised on key interviews, through which initial codes were generated. After being coded, the data was categorised into core categories in the second phase (Bruscaglioni, 2016). In the third phase, multiple sources and analyses of data were triangulated (Bryman, 2004), and additional analysis was conducted before resulting with the analysis presented in the next chapters of this thesis. The analysis process was supported by the continuous writing and revision of narratives surrounding the key themes emerging from data. These narratives were further developed through attendance to conferences and workshops, opening up the findings to constructive critique and novel approaches to their theorisations. After outlining the key methodological decisions and considerations, the following three chapters are dedicated to the presentation of the findings emerging from the empirical study.

CHAPTER 4: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

After exploring the features of the conducted empirical research in the previous chapter, this chapter marks the first out of three chapters addressing the findings of the empirical study. Specifically, it explores the first research question: *How are postgraduate students' experiences and perceptions shaped by the changing social and political conceptions of the roles and the purpose of higher education?* Following this, the chapter investigates participants' perceptions and experiences in the business school, as well as their views on the purpose of education, and their role in the educational process. It is broadly divided into three sections.

Student perceptions of education and studying, notably the student views on what consists knowledge, and what learning entails in the business school environment are presented in the first section. Students perceived learning as either an element of professional development, or a process of personal growth. These competing approaches to learning reflected the student focus either on outcomes of their educational process, or the educational process itself (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004). At the same time, findings suggest that the lines between the two perceptions were vague and characterised by overlaps and tensions. Furthermore, the perceptions tended to significantly change over time: in many cases the student focus on outcomes, or on exchange value of their education gradually shifted towards the intrinsic value embedded in the process, particularly toward the end of the programme.

The second section of this chapter explores the student perceptions and experiences of consumerism in TTBS. Here, students discussed the situations and organisational practices fundamental to their perceptions of being

customers in the business school. The discussion ranged from the more obvious sources of consumer identity, such as tuition fees and the resulting feelings of entitlement to co-creation of the educational experience (Molesworth, Scullion & Hearn, 2016), to less evident sources such as the material practices and layouts, nature of communication and relationships with members of staff, and the responsibility to tend for future students. Finally, the third section exposes the emerging theme of a relationship between the materiality and design of business school space, and the development of workplace environment in the business school. Some of the themes identified, and further detailed in chapter six, included students' perceptions of their role as employee-like, supported with corporate designs, and the social interactions resembling the workplace. The outcomes of such experiences are also discussed, namely the routinisation of educational labour, and the feelings of unease in such a setting.

Considering the interrelatedness of the three research questions, this chapter also sets the scene for the following chapters, that largely focus on the factors of influencing the emergence of consumerist perspective (discussion on rankings in chapter five) and work perspectives (discussion on organisational spaces in chapter six). Thus, the first section of this chapter aims to provide a more substantive level of analysis, with the second and third section expanded in great detail in the following chapters.

4.1. Education as learning

Reflecting back on the academic discussions presented in the introduction and the Literature review chapter, it can be argued that the social and the political conceptions of the roles and purposes of higher education have fundamentally changed in the past several decades (Bok, 2003; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007),

resulting with the 'crisis' of higher education in the UK (Anderson, 1993; Collini, 2012). More recently, management education and, specifically, the institution of a business school in which it is provided, has been increasingly considered as central to re-purposing higher education for the future (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016).

Amongst the substantive changes in management education, however, student attitudes and perspectives on learning and education seem to remain largely unexplored. While UK higher education policy (Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016) is built on the assumption that student interest lies in obtaining high quality, value-for-money education that will yield financial benefits in years to come, there is a lack of evidence that this is indeed the case. Therefore, an important question to ask at the beginning of this section is why students study and, more importantly, why they persist in their studies over the course of the programme (Barnett, 2007; 2015). To do so, the student perception of education needs to be explored, as well as what, in their view, is entailed in the educational process.

Studying definitely means to grow: to gain experience, to learn, to broaden my career perspective. But the biggest part is to grow personally and gain knowledge. (Emma)

What is the point of studying? It's really hard to explain this (laugh). It broadens my knowledge about the world, I can study in class or from others students. I can learn from their failures; learn how they deal with same problems. I guess, education is basically about how to deal with society in proper way. (Aulia)

Two things, I'd say. First is building character, and the second is catching up with the last 3500 years of human development. While the body of knowledge is way too big now to really catch upon, you can try to make sense of at least some of it, and be able to see how it all fits. I think that's the main purpose. (Lukas)

Broadly, the majority of students shared the same interest in personal growth and gaining knowledge from their educational experience. However, when students were asked to unpack the concepts of 'knowledge' and 'growth', several key conceptualisations of education were unravelled and broadly separated into student interest in the professional development on the one hand, and the student interest in the personal development on the other. The two perspectives will be discussed in the following section.

4.1.1. Studying and student professional development

The view of management education as being closely related to skills development is found in the basis of current socio-political discourse in the UK (see Johnson, 2016), and is also a dominant point of interest in UK business schools' activities, specifically with relation to attracting new students. This view, unanimously shared by all participants, was central to students' interest in getting educated, but to various extents.

The reason I'm doing this programme is essentially that I want to make myself more employable. That's in one sentence that really summarises why I'm here. I'm hoping this course will provide me with skills and knowledge which I can go into the working world with. (Chiara)

In many cases, education was perceived as a stepping stone towards better career opportunities, with student experience being means to tangible ends. Reflecting back on Barnett's (2007) point, such perceptions reflect the student desire to move from being and having one kind of life, towards being and having another kind of life. At the same time, student accounts also support Barnett's point that being a student entails a wider process of transition.

This year of studying for me has been the means to an end I hope. So for me it's really about the end result. It's been really an interesting year,

I've learned an awful lot, particularly first semester. I learned probably more than I expected, and more than I realised at the time. Because you don't really have time to reflect to what you're doing, it's just projects and essays and exams. I wasn't until maybe Christmas break when I realised, yeah, I've taken a lot in. (Ciaran)

With their progression through the educational process, students gained an understanding of their learning as a process of exploration of the unknown. This often surprised them, as their initial expectations were driven by the linearity of the educational process with predefined outcomes and goals. With this realisation, student perspective on the purpose of education expanded beyond the professional development and the exchange value of the degree (Willmott, 1995).

Learning process remains the same, but the focus before was narrower on a subject matter, and not on a purpose. That has switched now; it's more about a purpose for me now than the subject. But probably also because one thing that actually has been good at this program is that I interconnected on both my existing knowledge and my new knowledge a lot more, so I would feel a lot more comfortable to work in a position that I've not been precisely educated for. I would feel much more comfortable to work on a broader level just with having that oversight sense of strategic direction that's probably enough to give me a working environment I don't need any special detailed knowledge about a specific company or industry. But that is something that I had to develop for myself. I think all the courses were kind of separated, but when you bring them all together, you get a rounded picture, and at least I can see how I can have an impact. And that is actually good, I think I just realized that today. I was critical about individual bits but I didn't realize that in the background I already brought that up to the next level and turned it into something useful for me. (Paul)

A key point that emerged among participants, and exemplified in Ciaran's and Paul's accounts, was the realisations that the assessment of the value of learning requires time. With uncertainty presenting an unavoidable feature of being a student (Barnett, 2007), and the complexity of educational process

reduced to a short and seemingly linear process, students emphasised the need for reflection.

4.1.2. Students' conceptualisation of learning and assessment

The formal nature of management education taking place in business schools is another topic perceived as relevant for student professional development. While students shared some of the frustrations with TTBS' organisational and educational practices, assessment practices were unquestionably among the more criticised areas of the educational process.

I think the business school should teach students to think in a business way, but I don't think I have gained a lot of abilities in that aspect. The most important thing I have learnt here is how to write essays (laugh). We have written a lot of essays and I don't think we have a lot of opportunities to show our business abilities, like to really get in touch with real businesses or real companies. I think that having to just go to lectures and write essays is a little bit disappointing. (Li Yan)

Such frustrations, however, seemed to result not from the assessment processes *per se*, but from the uncertainty and vagueness of the student's expectations of "thinking in a business way". This could be attributed to the market-driven reliance on appealing organisational image (Alvesson, 2013) that shapes the student impression of business schools as places where the largely black-boxed notion of 'business' is taught.

The impression of learning as a mechanistic accumulation of knowledge was also very much seen among students from the Western countries, such as in the example of Hanna from Germany. Such perceptions are fuelled by the ever-increasing standardisation in contemporary management education (Furedi, 2011). As exemplified in the following sections, students that shared similar views on how to learn also tended to be most critical and frustrated

when they were unable to pinpoint the source of their dissatisfaction. On the other hand, this view of learning seems to be embedded in the fast-paced service delivery approach that limits the opportunity for reflection and exploration, and encourages such pedagogically restrictive approaches to learning.

It's because you use your brain in a different way, if you work I would say you use different parts, but learning by heart is completely different thing and you must completely get into it again so I think that was more challenging than I expected. (Hanna)

Surprisingly, marks were seen as an important, but not vital to the educational process. Students who exhibited firm views on education as a stepping stone to a career, tended instead to perceive a job position as an indicator of a successful educational process. Again, such views indicate the displacement of educational value from the educational process itself, to its tangible outcome, i.e. the exchange value of the degree (Willmott, 1995).

I mean, it's probably about results as well. I'd like to get a really good mark and if I do a good dissertation I'd be pushing for distinction. At the same time, it's not crucial for me. I'd be happy if I walked away with 55% but had a good job lined up in September or October. That'd be fine. I'd be happy with that. I'd prefer that to getting 78% overall and no job. (Ciaran)

In other cases, the point of education was seen as being much broader than the formal grade received at the end of formal education. Instead, the education process remained central to student interests (Ball, 2004; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005).

I think studying is about improving your skills and knowledge, it's not about getting good mark; marks and scores don't matter at all. It's about the knowledge which I get from others because everyone has their own different thoughts and here people come from different countries and

cultures so I want to learn about their cultures. It's a type of studying for me, study of the people, sharing the knowledge, and increasing your knowledge about the world and how it works. (Aarav)

Among many (especially international) students, formal assessment was often seen as a cause of competition in which individuals' capabilities are inevitably related to their marks. Anaya praised the system of anonymous marking as it provided her with shelter from such labelling, and diminished the possibility of an informal competition among students.

I used to have these huge discussions with one of my friends about marks. They would say you need to get good marks. For what? If you get 60 or 90, you go into the world, and what actually matters is your hard work. I come from the background where people firmly believe in that. In India it's all about marks you got, and it's always about comparing with others. And that's another good thing that I have learned over here, after coming to British education, I mean, here, is that here your marks are anonymous. Nobody knows each other's marks, which is a very good practice. Because, back home, when you get, like a 50, I would feel that it would in a way decide who I am. It's a very unhealthy competition. It [should be] more for you to see, ok, this is what I've done last year and want to do better this year. So that is the healthy way of competing. I was saying this to my mother the other day. She works in the school and she actually don't tell anybody anything about the marks. I mean, they used to put it on a bulletin board and everybody just used to come and see the marks. But I think that here it doesn't matter how much you get. And nobody talks about it as well. It's a very personal thing. Close friends of yours might ask you, but we don't discuss or gossip about marks in general. I think that in a way it is good because it doesn't let you decide who you are based on your marks. (Anaya)

To conclude, a large segment of student conceptualisation of their education was related to their professional development and to the increase of their employability. It is important to note the key role time played in student perceptions of their professional development, as many of them grew aware of the importance of reflection on their learning quite late in the process.

Furthermore, marks seemed to hold little relevance from the exchange value perspective, and instead were seen as practically irrelevant, if not directly related to better employment opportunities. In this sense, the success in the 'real world' replaced marks as indicators of student worth. From the use value perspectives, marks remained secondary to development of knowledge and skills. It is important to note that, regardless of their dismissive views on marks, and given the highly competitive nature of today's job markets, students were still very much concerned about the marks, merely as numerical indicators of their value to the potential employers.

Furthermore, the focus on image as opposed to substance in contemporary business schools (Gioia & Corley, 2002; Alvesson, 2013) was also reflected in students' attitude towards processes, such as assessment, which had a potential to influence the ways others perceive them. Here, students (particularly international ones) seemed to appreciate the anonymity of the assessment process that enabled them to underperform anonymously and, if this occurred, build their relationships and confidence around their successes.

4.1.2. Studying and student personal development

Continuing with the theme of the relationship between education and students, this section explores the student accounts of the experiences of their personal development. While the commercialisation of management education provides a significant push towards professional skills development (Grineski, 2000; Tymon, 2013) personal development remained a significant element of student experience. This was particularly visible from student accounts of benefits and challenges arising from their learning in a

multicultural environment, as well as from the challenging but appreciated process of broadening their worldviews.

4.1.2.1. Multiculturalism

As detailed in the Methodology chapter, over 90% of students enrolled on the MSc in Management programme at the time of data collection were international students. The high level of multiculturalism in TTBS was an important factor of organisational image, suggesting its positive effect on the educational process. This also meant that the international environment challenged the students' views and opinions of what they considered to be normal behaviours, attitudes and practices.

... working with different people, and get to know that what you thought is a normal behaviour or a normal structure is not normal because other people are not structured or not organised in the same way. That something you considered as normal is not, because others don't do it. You get to know yourself really better I think. (Emma)

Probably because the cultures are very different and how things work is different, meeting new people from different background, that's what changed me. Having to work with group of people that have different backgrounds, speak different languages. This interaction changed me the most. (Lin)

The importance of the plurality of cultural, academic and professional backgrounds in personal development was a common emerging theme characterised by two specific features. The first feature was related to the importance of active involvement with other students through group work and social interaction. The second feature was the recurring significance of time and reflection, as students began to appreciate the experience only after the activity itself took place. Observation data from the beginning of the academic year indicated that students had significant challenges and concerns

regarding group work with their colleagues from other cultural backgrounds, and have even criticised the programme and TTBS for putting them through this experience.

I had one good group work because we had a Scottish guy, me and other German girl and a Chinese. Other than that, having 2-3 Chinese in a group just makes my life really hard because I'm doing all the work [...] Their English is... I have no idea how half of the people started out this program managed to get through the [English language] test. They have a very interesting relationship towards copyright and research and we have a wonderful relationship, they are really nice and interested and most of them are really happy to be here and exchange information and to learn. And they want to cook their food for us, and we cooked our food for them. But, academically it's not at all stimulating and having them in group makes it very difficult for everyone else because their writing is not up to standard and most of the time the input isn't as well. [...] And I was lucky in a way because I had really nice ones who were very willing... I mean, I kind of had to get it out of them, but if I asked them 25 times, most would say something. But I know that in other groups they were bad. They decided not to contribute in any way, they only posted Wikipedia as a source. (Hanna)

Students often expressed their dissatisfaction with how their work relationships developed, particularly with students from China. The plurality of cultural and professional backgrounds was particularly seen as a burden for a successful performance among students focused on the completion of the task as a stepping stone towards the degree.

4.1.2.2. Expanding the worldviews

In the light of the socio-political discourse, and considering the notions of studying as a part of professional and career development (Johnson, 2016; Grineski, 2000), it was interesting to see that most participants expressed their interest in studying for the sake of learning and broadening their worldviews.

I like the role of being a student here and actually I think I'm not very ambitious like seeking for a job, going for the interviews, I just want to study here, to gain some knowledge, to enrich my life, just this, very simple. (Li Yan)

Observations and informal interviews suggest similar views, characterised by placing the interest in studying in relation to the disinterest in employment and the labour market. In such cases students seemed to find the ongoing purpose in extending their education, while at the same time not needing to face highly competitive labour markets, and the disappointment and rejection that they inevitably bring.

I think I've been exposed to subject matter I didn't really know about before, which I found quite interesting this year, and which opened new directions for me. So, in terms of explicit goals, I don't have one thing in life and going for it. In terms of the overall spectre, I definitely learnt things I would never consider before, and met people that have done it. (Patrick)

In other cases, the importance of education for expanding the worldviews was much less obscured by anxiety. It was internalised as an important process of personal enrichment and exposure to new experiences and knowledge that provides students with the feeling of relevance and importance.

The important point to note is that student expectations and perceptions of education change over time. This is also represented in the findings, where participants reflected on the changes in their expectations. In most cases, these changes led to the learning experience being perceived less in terms of a sum of outcomes, and more as an ongoing process.

Yes, my mood changed in the last month or two. I reflected on my opinion on a business school, actually, in a last couple of days because I knew you would ask me. I kind of went away from the expectations and a reality here, and questioned the role of the business school in

manager development or leadership development because my personal development here is related to this. I'm critical. I'm open-minded and curious about pretty much everything, but if I would only stick to the business school with a quite narrow mind, it would lead me in a certain direction, you know. Without questioning what we are taught here, I think people cannot develop. We are supposed to develop our own models and so on, give opinions and analyse things, but it is always in a certain setting that doesn't give us the freedom to start questioning issues from the very basic assumptions. (Paul)

[Studying is] a life-long process. But since it's sold as a good, it's something you attain, and then you have it for the rest of your life. And this is what TTBS does very well, they actually make people learn. The alternative is to make people study for an exam they'll forget about afterwards, so they'll stay stupid and become efficient employees who never question anything. (Mia)

Such thinking represents a stark contrast from observations at the beginning of the programme when a key consideration was to ensure the least painful and challenging process. With students gaining experience, and increasingly feeling pressured by the approaching need to enter the job market, they seemed to reconsider their views on the education process.

4.2. Consumption of education

Studying in today's business school settings inevitably leads to practices related to, or at least resembling, purchasing a service. In this sense, students were significantly influenced by the socio-material environments in business schools. While such environments in TTBS strongly reflected the social and the political perspectives on management education, they also increased the tensions found in student accounts, that seem to be arising from different approaches to the valuation of the educational process (Ball, 2004; Willmott, 1995; Karpov, 2013).

[...] Like having a reception at the entrance gives you a feeling of, 'Oh, I'm here to be served, I am a client here, I'm here to purchase something. And look! There's someone to help me. I'll press the bell and someone, like in a hotel, concierge, someone will come and talk to me'. (Savina)

I do feel like a customer. Consequentially, I feel like I am a little entitled to get something back because even though you are the student and they [TTBS staff] have an ability to tell you what to do, you also feel like you should have an ability to tell or influence somehow how your lectures should be and how they should be structured, so that you receive the best quality of education possible. And what would suit you and your class mates best, I think that's very important part of it. (Nora)

The consumerist perspective most students held when studying in TTBS is not necessarily experienced passively. As customers, they tended to show an increased interest in co-creation of the service they purchase. With money being involved, students were not happy with a command-and-control approach to their educational experience, and instead required a more inclusive role in their education. Considering the specific nature of the educational process, characterised with outcomes often experienced a long time after the process itself, there is a real concern that student views may potentially be inadequate, or even harmful, if uncritically implemented in the curriculums and the educational processes.

4.2.1. Student consumer rights

Apart from the increased concern for their active role in co-creation of their education, students that strongly identified as consumers also tended to feel more obligated to utilise their consumer rights. By being put in a position of a consumer, students felt entitled to complain on the processes, curricula, assessment, facilities, etc. The positive outcome of such engagement is the increased accountability of business schools towards their users. However, it

also limited the participants' identification with their organisational position as students.

I do feel like a customer, and that's why I feel like I have the right to complain, which I've never felt as much before. And to some extent that does make me feel a bit less like a student. (Chiara)

When I first came here, [feeling like a customer] was the impression I got, but simply because everything works so well and because contrast on my old university in Germany where it's for free so you are not a customer and you feel you can't expect everything. Here... I even paid less than all the Chinese students, but it still feels like there is so much I can expect, and so much they are offering. Me feeling like a customer, yeah, I would definitely say so. (Lukas)

Consumerism seems to be palpable in management education in the UK, particularly among postgraduate students coming from different educational systems. Such environment was very positively perceived from the student perspective, as it lead to the feeling of being catered for. At the same time, the commercial context was seen not only as enriching TTBS' offer, but also as means of student empowerment.

Because I'm paying, I think that I do have, or should at least have, the ability to influence the classes and teaching. In some sense I think we do, because we got a chance to give feedback, but I think that it's also very important as a student to get a feeling like you are getting the same amount of effort you are putting, you're getting the same amount of effort back. That is an important role to take on, to make sure that you're getting that respect. (Nora)

The influences of the commercialisation on student empowerment was, however, not limited to the requirements for an inclusive co-creation of education practices and the curricula. It also lead to vague and at times contradicting expectations of a particular organisational behaviour in which, as Nora eloquently argued, TTBS should have matched the amounts of

“effort” students put in their experience and learning. The customers-students, therefore, expected not only the increased levels of quality of education, but also the increased quality of the delivery, and their social interactions with the staff.

Occasionally, yeah, I do feel like a customer. While in my daily routine I rather feel like an employee, during lectures for instance, I do feel like a customer. The way professors behave. How nice they are. Professors and maybe also the support staff, probably because they are so nice I feel like a customer. Because the customer is king and that’s why they have to make you feel you’re the king. Even if we aren’t. And that’s the problem. (Mia)

Pressured by the organisational expectations on the one hand, and the awareness of the financial investment students made on the other, academic and support staff in TTBS were inclined to take an approachable and friendly stance towards students. While such behaviour is seen as desirable in public policy (see Johnson, 2016), students tended to have a seemingly counter-intuitive issue with such behaviours, particularly when seeing injustices being made in individual cases related to the international composition of the programme.

4.2.2. Perceptions of consumerism in TTBS

The focus of the educational process around the student experience, coupled with the assurance of value-for-money, and resulting with pragmatic educational processes seemed to be incompatible with the messiness and unpredictability arising from the internationalisation of student cohorts.

I have a friend who is a PGT student at another business school in the UK. She also says that [studying with students from China] is absolutely horrible. They speak horrible English, don’t show up for

meetings, don't contribute, they just sit there with blank stares and snack on Chinese food. I don't think it's a problem typical for TTBS. I do understand they bring the international flare, bring in money because they pay more than we do... I am pretty sure that one of the reasons [behind business schools having difficulties with attracting students from Western countries] are Chinese students... Of course it's unfair if you do more work, of course it's unfair if you have three Chinese in a group and other group only has one. But there is no reason to bitch about it, as it's not going to make it any better. You just have to suck it up and do it. But a lot of people recently really began complaining and started switching group because they didn't want to work in a group with them again. (Hanna)

In this honest account Hanna reflected on the experience from the context of education as linear, non-challenging process of transforming inputs – lectures, studying and group work – into measurable outputs (marks and degrees), failing to see the process itself as a learning experience. In her view, she paid for the former, not the latter.

I think how students are perceived is kind of more as a nuisance, sometimes. They just bring a lot of money, I think, the resources to TTBS. I think undergrads are here for much longer and they represent far higher percentage of students that are here, and PhD students are a very valuable resource in terms of academic research. So, as an MSc student I don't feel like I'm a massive addition. Which is why I'm a course rep for four courses. Because I think that's wrong. In one year you can still get a lot of stuff done and make it better for the students coming after you. Although I'm feeling that the system is quite hard to crack, get through and change. (Chiara)

Postgraduate students quickly realised that their potentially empowering position as a consumer also puts them in a position in the organisation in which they were not necessarily as valued as they might have expected. Some students, like Chiara, decided to tackle this sense of semi-belonging and irrelevance by taking a proactive role in the student life. In this way, students

felt that they made a difference, not necessarily for their cohort, but for the future generations.

No, I don't feel like a customer. I think that everyone feels like they're studying and working pretty hard. It's not something you think about when you're studying. I mean, the main thing for me is to get a job at the end of it, so it's a kind of sabbatical to the next thing and it's a lot easier than working. So, I'm enjoying it (laugh). So even I if felt like a customer, it would be fine. Um, but no I can't say I really feel like that. (Ciaran)

Alternatively, students take a different view on their position in TTBS. Still keeping a clear view on employability as the desired outcome of their education, their time in TTBS was perceived as a break from the 'real world' which they wanted to return to. By placing their focus on their future in the 'real world', the expectations that students had from TTBS were limited to providing a more or less enjoyable experience.

I don't know [whether I feel like a customer]. It definitely depends, I think for some people it's like actually buying an asset, because it's all about the marks they achieve, it's about putting the University name in their CV and so on. But, given I was more keen on personal development and actually learning something useful, that is not really the case. Also the real value of this whole experience here can only be measured in, I don't know, 50 years, because you never know what is going to be worth. (Paul)

The perception of consumerism among students was also very much related to the personal approach to their education, as well as with the multiplicity of expectations students held. As Paul put it, students who considered their education as an asset have a stronger consumer identity, while others who were more invested in their personal development saw the outcomes as vague and unmeasurable.

In general, I don't think students should pay this much to be able to study. And, currently having to pay this much money – and I only have to pay 2/3rds of the programme, I feel like a client as well as a student at the school. I'm making a purchase; I'm making an investment. (Savina)

The sentiment among many students was that paying current levels of tuition fees for their education was not desirable. While the majority agreed that there were issues with paying high tuition fees, most students also felt the urge to justify and provide alternatives. In many cases, however, high tuition fees had a significant impact on the development of a consumerist perspective on student education, as they influenced other TTBS' practices.

I mean, getting a free hoodie at the beginning of the year, a calculator, a bag, a bottle of water, you know. We got so many things and it just feels like you are buying the degree. So, yes, I feel like a customer. But I'm still a student, but there's definitely an aspect of buying, yeah. I'd rather not have all of these extras, to be honest, and just get what we're here for, the courses and the support in terms of academic support and content of the courses. I'd rather sit in a less fancy room and not get a hoodie, and pay a few grand less than... I don't think these extras are necessary. (Chiara)

I mean, I would feel like a customer if I would have to always pay for things here, even for tuition fees. They do it, they just get it out of my bank account without me even noticing it's gone. (Julia)

The rise of tuition fees has also resulted with the rise in the amount of non-essential services TTBS delivered. As described by Chiara, such gestures further enhanced the student feeling as consumers, being pampered with the most pleasurable and comfortable experience. In the case when consumer-related activities were obscured, as it was the case with tuition fee payments, students tended to have less inclination to feel as customers.

4.3. Education as work

As their time on the programme passed by, students increasingly felt that the type and the level of personal investment required for their studies increasingly resembled the types and levels of personal investment they might expect and experience in their professional careers. Student time in TTBS has over the course of the programme become routinized and driven by deadlines.

That is a very good thing about this school, the way it's structured. You almost feel like going to work, you see your colleagues all the time, it's very nice. (Nora)

[I feel] as having an awfully bad paid job. More like an employee. (Mia)

The intensive one year MSc programme demanded students to regularly attend TTBS and their classes, and to participate in group work. To help students with these pressures, TTBS provided them with office-like facilities and resources to successfully engage with the coursework. At the same time, the pressures related to the condensed structure of the programme and the large financial investments in their education become coupled with, for most students, new social and learning environments where they were required to communicate in their non-native language.

Pressured to excel, students employed a 9-to-5 routine, especially during the exam periods. Such routinisation was widely supported in the spatial designs and arrangements, as well as in the socio-material practices explored in chapter six. Participant accounts showed that their student and employee roles were strongly intertwined and changed based on the progression of the programme, differentiating between the "student life" and "the routine" of a working environment.

So, I noticed that last December when, during exam period, every morning I went to the [TTBS Library], everybody had his or her seat. Everybody knew where I was sitting so my spot was always empty. And we went in there, at like 8, 9 am, and then went 'morning', 'morning', 'morning'. And it really gave the feeling of an office and not the University. (Mia)

The routine embedded in TTBS' everyday life is separated from what student life entails. The increased pressures and the workload during the exam periods has led to students spending significant amounts of time in social and learning spaces in TTBS, which became not only spaces for learning, but also the spaces of work and socialisation.

Actually we were [in TTBS] from 8 till 6 (during term time). I did all my work here and nothing at home, so it can be compared to work situation. Now, since the lectures are over, and you can better organize yourself, it's just student life. But maybe when I start writing my dissertation, I will be back in the routine. I used to sit here with Hanna in the meeting rooms for the entire day, from 6 in the morning until the evening. We were here so much we could have slept here. (Sofia)

While in most cases students had difficulties in adequately defining how they felt in the TTBS environment, the feeling of being some type of employees was strongly represented in their accounts and in the observational data. Furthermore, students perceived this experience as being purposefully created for them through business school practices, as a sort of traineeship. Some students noticed that the routinized work environment was also supported with the specifics of the language used in everyday communication among students, and also between academic staff.

I feel that I'm both a student and also like an employee candidate. You know? Yeah, I think there is an apparent effort on business school's part to prepare students for life after graduation. And it's just not education-wise, it's also career-wise, and you know, like, self-development-wise.

Um, yeah, I would say not only student, but also like a self-development trainee or something like that. (Savina)

The increased focus on professional development, as well as the career-oriented approach to marketing to potential applicants has also led to a 'corporatisation' of the language in TTBS. The use of terms like 'project' instead of 'group essay', or 'meeting' instead of 'group work' created the impression of the corporate environment and implemented this professional language into the vocabulary of students.

I feel like this is a consultancy job without being paid. We have these rooms for meetings. I mean, I would have never said that I have a meeting in my prior University. I was like to have a 'group project', and here is 'meeting'. And this feeling which is created here is not a feeling of being at the University. It's more like a, yeah, work environment. (Lukas)

The seemingly non-existent separation between their role as students and as employees made participants experience certain work-related emotions that were usually not related to student experience.

I don't know why but don't feel I ever felt comfortable in this building, probably because I study here, attend all the lectures, and do all the group work. So, subconsciously, this space represents work in my mind, so when I'm here I just want to finish things and go. [TTBS environment] is more like the work environment, like when you work in a company. No matter how magnificent it looks like, when you finish work, you want to get out of there. I think that's the feeling. (Chen)

The connections between the TTBS' socio-material and learning environments and the workplace environments in some cases lead to unfortunate and potentially pedagogically harmful emotions among students. The feeling of the workplace limited the students' wishes to learn, explore and be challenged in a supportive and politically neutral environment.

I really see this as a job or program which I'm doing, but the moment I'm gone [for the day], I'm away. It's a shame, I had different expectations, but I may have been a little naïve when I came here. (Aulia)

In this sense, TTBS unintentionally induces the feelings of alienation, frustration and regret. It also invokes a feeling of necessity for students to clearly separate their private and their professional/educational lives, leading to the perceptions of learning and personal development as a linear, outcome-oriented, pragmatic activity.

To conclude, students predominantly perceived the TTBS environment as explicitly emulating the workplace environment through its design and its practices. While it comes as no surprise that UK business schools, in the light of the socio-political pressures in the UK, increase their focus on the student professional development, participant accounts suggest that the workplace environment also influences their perception of themselves as students, and their perception of their education. On the one hand, it has a positive impact on the communal spirit among students, thus strengthening the bonds students make with their colleagues and their peers during the long hours they spend in the office. On the other hand, the workplace environment alienates students from their school, as education becomes perceived as (poorly paid) work instead of a personal and professional development. By limiting their personal engagement with their educational process, students also tend to limit their learning experience to a pragmatic accumulation of knowledge required for successful completion of the programme. Also, such approach to education affects the student ability for reflection on what they learned and experienced, and for the development of their career goals and their future, as will be discussed in the following section.

4.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter details the student perceptions of studying and learning in the business school setting. At first, student attitudes towards education followed the exchange and the use value dichotomy (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Karpov, 2013), with their initial conceptualisation of education and learning focused either on the value of the experience itself, or on the value of the future outcomes of the experience. Findings, however, suggest that, over time, the initially clear separation between the two approaches became increasingly blurry, as did the student views of what makes education valuable. This echoes Barnett's (2015) view of education as a process, or a trajectory, during which students transition from certainty to uncertainty (Freire, 1994; Barnett, 2007; 2015). From this perspective, highly dynamic transformations and changes of student expectations are embedded in their perceptions of their educational setting, thus making their experiences also highly complex and fluid. Following this, three distinctive student perspectives of educational process are identified as dominant in student accounts: (1) education as learning; (2) consumption of education; and (3) education as work.

Findings suggest that students conceptualise learning as a personal experience of growth and gaining knowledge, both of which relate to either professional or personal development. It is suggested that student perceptions of the purpose of learning significantly change over time, from dominant orientation on tangible outcomes of education, to a broader conceptualisation of education that expands beyond the professional development. This shift is also reflected in the student understanding of assessment, where marks hold very little value in terms of defining the students: from the perspective of tangible

outcomes, students argue that the only indicator of educational success is good performance on the job market. Still, marks remain an intrinsic, anxiety-inducing feature of the student learning experience.

When discussing the purpose of education from the perspective of personal development, two dominant topics emerged. First, students felt that the educational experience in an international institutional setting provided them with important experiences and relationships with people from different socio-cultural backgrounds. At the same time, gaining that experience was difficult and frustrating, as their worldviews were challenged. In this sense, a multicultural environment challenged the students' focus on achieving best performance in reaching the best possible marks.

Nevertheless, expanding the worldviews remained an important purpose of education from the student perspective. This was particularly the case towards the end of the programme, when students increasingly felt pressure from moving to the next, post-educational phase of their lives. Considering the significant challenges arising from the competitive labour markets, students held on to education as an activity that gives them a sense of purpose.

Student experiences of commercial environments are seen to be rooted in their perception of commodified education largely supported by specialised rankings, and reflected in business school socio-material practices. As paying customers, students felt empowered to influence and shape their educational process. While students felt entitled to an active role in shaping their educational experience for themselves and future students, their role as consumers also led to the feeling of being only temporarily a part of the school. By being treated as customers and by seeing themselves as such, students were at the same time empowered and marginalised. Still, students who approached their education dominantly as a stepping stone towards a career,

or as an opportunity to change their professions were more concerned with the steep tuition fees and the amount of non-essential services provided by TTBS which, in their view, were not necessary.

The student perceptions of education as work have exclusively emerged from the findings. Here, students suggested that the linearity and the fragmentation of the education into sets of deliverables, coupled with the socio-material setting in TTBS, and the practice-oriented teaching, induced the feeling of a workplace setting. Such environment yielded some positive outcomes, with students developing relationships with their peers, learning how to work in international contexts, and acclimatising to the corporate world. At the same time, TTBS and the educational setting it provides became conceptualised as work, thus triggering workplace-related behaviours and emotions, most notably the alienation from the educational environment, and a focus on the pragmatic accumulation of knowledge.

This chapter provided a broad context of student perceptions of their education, with a specific emphasis on learning, consumerism and work. The following chapters are dedicated to a deeper exploration of these perceptions in the context of student interactions with specialised media rankings (chapter five), and the features of TTBS' organisational space (chapter six).

CHAPTER 5. STUDENTS AND SPECIALISED RANKINGS

This is the second out of three chapters exploring the findings of the empirical study conducted for the purpose of this doctoral research. It addresses the research question 1.1.: *How do specialised media rankings shape student perceptions of their educational experience?* The increased influence of specialised media rankings is explored in the context of the perception and consumption among postgraduate students in the UK. For the purpose of this thesis, the term media rankings indicate league tables specifically designed and created by for profit media organisations with an aim to provide subject-specific rankings of the postgraduate programmes on offer. In contrast to other subjects such as Law (Espeland & Sauder, 2007), business and management related postgraduate programmes are featured in multiple rankings, most notably Financial Times, Bloomberg Business Week, and US News and World Report, among others (Hazelkorn, 2011). Considering that the observational and interview data suggest the dominance of Financial Times rankings in staff and student accounts alike, the discussion mainly focuses on student experiences of Financial Times rankings.

Specialised media rankings are seen as increasingly essential factors in management students' educational choice (see Hazelkorn, 2011: 138), as well as key drivers in support of "an increasing desire to regulate, to monitor and to control the production of knowledge and learning" in business schools (Wedlin, 2006: ix). Set in the context of the features and implications of specialised rankings discussed in the Literature review chapter, this chapter explores four main themes emerging from the data. First, different ways students used media rankings as indicators of business schools' legitimacy

and reputation are explored. A specific interest is placed on exploring the assumptions regarding the dominance of rankings in student educational choices. Here, rankings are set against other factors influencing the educational choice, namely the location of the university and the business school, and the students' personal and professional networks.

The second section builds on the first by exploring student accounts of their understanding of specialised rankings. Here, a particular interest is placed on the student understanding of the influence of rankings on the practices of their institution and, ultimately, their educational experience. Furthermore, students' understanding of how rankings are created, and what is their purpose, is discussed in relation to student expectations of what rankings are supposed to contain and represent.

The third section moves beyond the exploration of how students understand and use rankings by considering why students use rankings. Here, multiple roles of rankings in student life are identified and explored: (1) rankings as means for justifying student educational choices to themselves and their social surroundings; (2) the influence of rankings in shaping and managing the student perceptions of self; and (3) the implications of rankings as features of student social mobility. The fourth section is dedicated to student relationship with rankings beyond their time in TTBS by detailing their views on rankings in the context of their professional future. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the empirical findings in the context of the reviewed literature.

5.1. Rankings and educational choice

In today's globalised postgraduate education market, potential applicants enjoy unprecedented levels of choice for their postgraduate education.

Findings suggest that the initial decision for many international students participating in this research was to make a choice of a specific country to study in. A strong tradition of higher education and the use of English language made the UK management education market a very desirable one. At the same time, the increasing financial investment required for studying and living in the UK for the duration of their programme (Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016) provided an additional challenge for many students making their final decision.

The first week of a new academic year was an exciting time for both the students and the staff at TTBS. Students, some of whom arrived to the City very recently, wandered the TTBS space with a mix of excitement, expectations, and confusion. It would take some time before they fully explored their social and learning spaces and settled in the school, the campus, the university and the City. Being enrolled on a one-year postgraduate programme, however, left students with little time for catching breath, as the range of activities and sessions during the first week reflected the hectic tempo of the remainder of their academic year, if not in terms of the workload, then at least in terms of the time they would be spending there.

During the Induction Week, students were required to attend a number of sessions, some of which were highly recommended by TTBS, while others remained optional. Moreover, a small number of sessions had specifically been highlighted in the timetable. At the beginning of the academic year 2014/2015, one of the highlighted activities was a Tuesday afternoon 'MSc in Management Rankings Explained' session. This one-hour session was dedicated to the specialised rankings, specifically emphasising the Financial Times rankings. This focus suggested that TTBS also recognised the importance of Financial Times rankings for the students attracted to the

postgraduate programmes and, therefore, perceived them as an important element of organisational image in communication with students. At the beginning of the session, the Programme Director inquired how many students consulted any type of published rankings, and around a half of the class raised their hand. The topic of the session provided the opportunity for first impressions regarding individual student perspectives on rankings and their importance for their education decisions. It also provided a glimpse into how rankings became institutionalised in TTBS, becoming more than a topic of discussion and interest for business school management and administration teams, and instead seen as an active part of the TTBS' relationship with its students.

Considering that over 90% of students were coming from international backgrounds and were new to the socio-cultural, pedagogical and educational settings in the UK, a session on rankings in their second day of studies (a prime-time of sorts) identifies TTBS' care for the reputation and an assurance that what was promised through the ranking position would also be delivered to students. The narrative of the session recorded in the field notes also suggested that TTBS strived to remind students that the reputation of the programme, as well as their own status on the rankings as alumni, would soon rely on their accurate and favourable representation of their student experience. This way, TTBS invited students to a mutually beneficial collaboration.

Rankings and their usefulness for students remained one of the more dominant topics during observations and informal interviews, leading the researcher to include a dedicated section on rankings in the interview guide as well (see Appendix D). As a result, the interview process provided an

important opportunity for a more structured conversation with students on the topic of rankings.

First of all, you get an impression. Where the University stands from the outside. Of course, rankings are different from real-life experience, but you get an impression if you don't have a clue. And then you start to do more research on the universities you might like. I think it really provides you with a good feeling because you think, ok, the programme sounds good, the university's ranking is good, and the programme is ranked good as well. I think it makes you feel safe. You know? (Emma)

For most international students, rankings were a starting position in their search for a suitable programme. In light of the large number of educational options on the market, rankings have provided students with an easy-to-use list of good places to study and, accordingly, have provided them with a sense that they were informed.

I did look at rankings, but I found that they are based just on income of students after they leave, so I wanted to take other factors into it. I noticed that TTBS is getting a lot of interesting speakers here, there is a good approach to entrepreneurship, and the whole place looks quite nice to be in. So, I did look at rankings, but obviously I was aware that there is more to it than that, for I wanted anyway. (Patrick)

Specialised rankings were often criticised by students for their narrow focus on the financial benefits of the degree. In contrast to key assumptions in the basis of most specialised rankings (Policano, 2005), the choice of education was rarely seen by students purely as an investment decision. Instead, they showed significant interest in information that would allow them to assess their fit with the institution of their choice. As a result, students argued that rankings failed to provide information on the informal factors of educational experience such as the institutional relationship with particular topics, exposure to guest speakers, adequate space, etc (Caza & Brower, 2015).

Findings suggest that the simplification of the inherently complex educational process (Espeland & Sauder, 2007), and the resulting simplicity of information provided through ranking programmes and schools are seen by students both as key factors of success of media rankings, and their key limitations. In line with the reasons behind the recent calls for more responsible consumption of rankings by ranking providers themselves (e.g. Bradshaw, 2013; Bloomberg Business Week, 2017), students felt that the provided information is overly simplified and focused exclusively on the financial outcomes.

Yes, the University is highly ranked, and I think that influenced my decision more [...] I think the brand of this University will be a lot better in the CV than the individual programme to an employer who isn't really aware of these individual rankings. Because it's a good university, it has a good reputation for lots of different things. (Patrick)

At the same time, findings suggest that, compared to the university rankings, students gave relatively little attention to specialised rankings. Instead, their interest was largely placed on the university rankings, as students perceived them as more impactful for their future careers; the student choice of the market device (Muniesa, Millo & Callon, 2007; Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012) was rather pragmatically related to its external recognisability. In other words, the broader scope of university rankings was perceived as more adequate, as it goes beyond the narrow representation of the reputation of the individual school, or of a specific programme.

5.1.1. The location of the School

When exploring the students' perceptions and uses of specialised rankings, it is important to place them in relation with other elements that contribute to student educational decisions. For many students, an important part of their

education was the suitable location of the business school and the university. Here, the term location represents not only the physical setting of the school, but also the social, the cultural and the political context in which education takes place. In this section, the relevance of specialised rankings is placed in relation to the geographical and reputational value of the City in which TTBS is located. While the confidentiality agreement with TTBS prevents a more detailed description of the City, it is important to note that TTBS is situated in a mid-size UK city with a rich historical heritage, and which is generally regarded as a desirable place to live and work in.

I choose [the City] because it's really the prettiest city I have ever been in. I wanted to come here for a very long time. I think this is a great choice, a great university and good place. (Li Yan)

For instance, [a different business school] was higher in the ranking position than TTBS. But I was thinking also about the importance of the city. It's like, I didn't want to study one year or two years in a bad city. I mean, because I know that for instance [a different business school] is a good university, but it is situated in an ugly city. (Francesco)

These accounts exemplify the importance of the location in students' educational decision: for many international students, a one-year programme was not only seen as an opportunity for learning and development, but also for gaining experience in different social, cultural and, in some cases, political environments.

Yes, also the environment is important. I guess [The City] is a really good place for studying. Particularly when compared to London, which is too busy and too crowded - I don't think London is the right place to study. (Aulia)

Similar attempts to find the balance between the reputation of the institution and the good quality of life were very much represented in the data. Student

choice of TTBS was not only related to the quality of its education or the market value of the degree, but also to the social and the cultural experience of living in a specific place. For most students, striking the balance between a nice location, a good quality of life, and a favourable reputation of the university is an important part of the educational choice.

5.1.2. Personal and professional networks

While the location of the school, and the social, cultural and political environments are all seen as important factors influencing student educational decisions, findings suggest that students' personal and professional networks played a vital role in their choice of the specific business school.

I came here because I have a friend who used to study here, and she was very satisfied. Also, during summer I met a guy who did (another programme) and he was so passionate about it, about [the City itself] and about this business school. And then I was like, ok, then I'll just apply here. (Mia)

Faced with increasingly homogenous management education markets characterised by the growing number of increasingly similar business schools and programmes, students heavily relied on their networks to help them make their choice. While the value of personal and professional networks may prove to be difficult to accurately measure and be accounted for on a regular basis, its importance was strongly represented in the findings, where good reputation of the institution among participants' professional and personal networks has in a number of cases been crucial for attracting them to TTBS.

I applied for almost 10 universities because I was really afraid that with [the degree in] fashion management I won't be accepted. (...) Actually I wanted to go to [another university] and then when I got accepted there, I decided on going there. But then, during this time I was doing an

internship and my supervisor there was always interested in how it's going, did I get any feedback and where I'm going to go, so I always updated him and then I got accepted in [another university] and to this university. I was unsure which one I wanted to go and she said that we will go to the HR department for an advice in case I want to come back in that company, what they would prefer. When I talked to them, they said [a very reputable university] is good but only for reputation and for literature and art department, but they have seen this university as being really good at management and research. The HR manager also studied at Cambridge and worked for 10 years in UK for L'Oréal, and she was recruiting in UK. She said that when they started recruiting, this university was one of the first universities they like to go and recruit. That was actually very convincing. (Sofia)

The power of the student's professional network is nicely exemplified in Sofia's example: her professional network had a profound influence on reassessing her decision and taking up an offer she initially decided to reject. In this and other cases recorded in the findings, the recommendations were largely based either on personal experience of the person providing the advice, or the professional experience accumulated in the workplace. While findings suggest that personal and professional networks were crucial to applicants' choice of TTBS, their future usefulness relied on a long-term institutional commitment to high quality and transformative (not necessarily always enjoyable) student experience that would leave a strong positive feeling about the institution among the graduates in the years to come.

To summarise, this section explored the role of specialised rankings in student educational choices. Findings suggest that the student use of specialised rankings was limited by the very characteristics that made rankings popular, namely simplification and commensuration of complex educational experience, and the simplicity of the ranking device itself (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012) in terms of the user-friendly representation of the information. From the student perspective, the inadequacy of specialised

rankings arose from the narrow focus on financial outcomes of education, and a low recognition of rankings among employers, particularly in international contexts, a point that will be elaborated further in the following sections. Instead, students tended to put more emphasis on their networks to assess the quality of not only learning and education, but also their social and cultural experiences in a specific location. This suggests that, contrary to the assumptions of the commercial context of contemporary management education, student interest in education is multifaceted and complex, moving beyond the simple focus on financial outcomes of individual educational processes. To further explore the nature of the relationship and consumption of specialised rankings, the following section focuses on the student understanding of the ranking designs, and explores student expectations from specialised rankings.

5.2. Student understanding and expectations from rankings

The emergence and the proliferation of specialised media rankings as an increasingly valued factor in student valuation and choice of the best possible management education (Wedlin, 2006; Policano, 2005) is very much related to their image as a scientifically valid product, whose design is methodologically rigorous and carefully developed. Simultaneously, the commercial focus of specialised media rankings requires rankers to provide simple information by means of a user-friendly design (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012). The resulting incompatibility between the complexity embedded in the ranking process, and the simplicity required on the market, is resolved by placing the focus on the latter and, by doing so, on the profitability of the ranking product.

The user-friendliness of specialised rankings is achieved through the carefully crafted image of professionalism, requiring consumers to trust the rankers and

their expertise. In other words, commercial rankings do not require nor encourage their consumers' understanding, scrutiny, or critique, but instead inspire individuals' resourcefulness in consumption, and creativity in interpretation.

Interviewer: Do you know what's behind rankings?

Nora: I don't really know.

Interviewer: What are they weighing?

Nora: I don't know. That's interesting, I should know that... (laughter)

While it is not reasonable to argue that students needed to understand all the details behind the rankings, the level of unfamiliarity, unawareness and, most importantly, indifference toward rankings and the ways they are constructed was alarming, particularly in the context of the intended use of rankings as indicators of the education quality. At the same time, findings suggest that the consumerist nature of rankings incited students on consumption based on assumption, opposed to the knowledge and understanding of the ranking methodologies.

I think [rankings] look at everything: the alumni, research power, the teaching team and resources, also the general impact and influence.
(Wang Fang)

I think that different newspapers base their rankings on different methodologies, so I know they can actually manipulate them for a little bit... (Chen)

Lacking the specific understanding of ranking methodologies, participants largely considered rankings as being based on measuring different features of the educational process, recognising a wide variety of ranking methodologies and the potential for their manipulation. Student assumptions tended to be developed in line with the questions regarding how rankings are constructed,

while the notion of the underlying idea, or value, behind rankings seemed to be elusive. Such views echoed the students' attempts to justify their lack of knowledge by focusing on what they knew.

Others openly admitted they have very limited to no understanding of rankings. This, however, does not necessarily mean that their responses did not make sense in the context of management education. When students openly talked about their preferences regarding the factors influencing specialised rankings, they discussed the features of the education, which they considered to be most important.

I think a future career and then maybe what people from the outside think about the programme. Of the structure maybe. Yeah, I think so.
(Emma)

Emma's account provides a number of clues. She focused on elements external to her experience. Coming from the professional background, and with an academic background in economics, her decision to study Management was a part of her intended career path. Lacking the understanding of what ranking information is based on, Emma filled the gaps in her knowledge with her views of what a good management education should be. For her, rankings became indicative of TTBS' image and career opportunities upon graduation.

Maybe the number of graduates and the number of employment which is written to the business school. For example, if there's 100 students in a business school and how many got the job after completing masters, let's suppose 50, so that would be criteria according to me. Maybe because of the faculties as well. If the ranking is really good, it might reflect good academics in the business school and in the department.
(Aarav)

For Aarav, rankings still reflected the employment and career prospects, but a connection was also made with the academic quality of ranked schools and

universities. Again, the nature of rankings was customised when infused with Aarav's expectations and views on what quality education entails. Savina, on the other hand, had quite a different view, placing student perceptions as the preferred ranking factor.

I have no idea. I think they would have the student perception. I know all the rankings in the US, like US ranking lists are based on student perceptions of major components. I think they also look at a postgraduate employment rate, and I don't know what else. (Savina)

Such differences in conceptualisation and understanding of rankings suggest the openness of rankings towards different interpretations of their results. Herein lies the potential reason for the popularity of rankings: instead of providing realistic and well informed representations of the management education market, rankings are designed to be interpreted and, by doing so, reflect individual desires and expectations.

To conclude, the design of the specialised media rankings relies on the consumer trust in rankers to adequately provide user-friendly and relevant information. As data suggest, the unfamiliarity was replaced by the assumptions about the factors influencing the results of rankings, thus allowing a critical insight into what students expected to see in rankings, and what they valued in their educational experience. In this sense, rankings mirrored the student concerns regarding employability and hope for positive effects of favourable rankings. At the same time, students assumed that rankings contain the information on the quality of the faculty and the educational and pedagogical characteristics of programmes and higher education institutions, even though such factors represent either a miniscule part of the ranking methodology, or are completely absent from it.

5.3. Multiple purposes of rankings

Following the discussions on the student use and understanding of specialised rankings, this section explores the student accounts on why rankings were used and what for. Here, four purposes of rankings are identified and presented. First, students utilised the simplicity of rankings to justify the financial and personal investment in the programme to themselves and their immediate professional and personal environments. Second, rankings are placed in a relation with the development of student self-perception through commensuration to a ranking position of their institution. Third, the ranking devices (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012) have a significant impact on enabling social mobility in terms of their use by national funding bodies when assessing scholarship applications. Also, rankings were at times used as indicators of the quality of education, and the student identification of the social class which they wanted to become members of. Finally, students rankings are found useful for managing student image in relation to their professional worth and experience. This is particularly the case in the final stages of their education, just before the transition into the labour markets.

5.3.1. Justification through rankings

Due to their universally understandable and simple design, rankings were extensively used by students in justifying their educational choice both to themselves and their immediate environments. Their educational decision in most cases resulted with significant changes in their social and family lives, relocation to another country with or without families, and the exposure to a new socio-cultural context. Facing the financial and emotional burden,

rankings seemed suitable as simple indicators of why their choices were worthwhile.

It just validates everything. I mean, I'm paying for this, it's a lot of money, especially for me. Maybe it's not the best, but it's good enough and when I'll go back to Brazil I'll be able to say that I finished something good. (Julia)

This type of validation was not only connected to the student surroundings – colleagues, parents, potential employers – but also to the framing in which their decision was self-validated as a sound one. A high ranking of their institution provided a reassurance to students that their efforts were well utilised as they were receiving good education and the opportunities they usually would not have access to.

I guess it signifies that you'll get a good salary and a good education. Um, I would be reluctant to spend a lot of money going to a university which is low down the rankings. I mean, the university as a whole is really highly rated outside and in the UK. (Ciaran)

From this perspective, it seems reasonable for students to believe that their education would result with financial benefits and higher employability, both of which justify all financial, emotional, and personal sacrifices made by the students and their immediate social surroundings. Furthermore, the issue of the cost of education was a frequent topic in conversations with students. Financial burden related to being educated in the UK was an important concern for students, and favourable rankings added to the feeling that their decision was both justified, and a good one.

The simple design and representation of specialised rankings, discussed in the literature review, provided students with an easier way to market themselves to potential employers and manage their professional image.

I think [rankings] are also good for future career because if the programme is ranked in Financial Times rankings, employers look at it. (Emma)

Again, the position on the ranking itself seemed to be less relevant; it is the fact of being ranked in the first place that was perceived to make a difference. This point, however, needs careful consideration in terms of the characteristics of different rankings. In our case, while QS rank over 800 universities (QS, 2017), specialised rankings such as Financial Times MSc Management rank only top 80 (Financial Times, 2017b). In the case of Financial Times, the exclusivity of the list required students to be more creative when interpreting the results. For this reason, students tended to focus less on the specific rank of the institution, and instead placed emphasis on what being featured on the list represents.

I think ranking show me reputation because afterwards the most important thing will be to look for a job (...) But obviously I know the rankings are based on research, and not necessarily on teaching quality [and] student satisfaction being only a part of it. (Chen)

The perception of the usefulness of rankings in the context of employability largely differs depending on personal backgrounds. Non-Western students tended to argue that specialised rankings made little difference for employment in their countries. A prime example is the situation in India, similarly portrayed by two participants when talking about their experiences with employers in their country:

Back home, companies don't really know which university is the best. They only know about Oxford and Cambridge and that's it. And other universities are just the same. (Aarav)

I think the degree you get in the UK is not considered to be very useful in India. If I apply for a job back home, I will earn no more than 10 000 pounds, not a big amount. Because of standard of living in India is really low, 10 000 pounds is also good money, but in context of this

programme and the money which I pay, I will not be compensated.
(Anaya)

These accounts suggest that rankings seem to be limited in their reach. This is also reflected in the observational data gathered during the data collection process, particularly towards the end of the programme. The narratives of international management students, most of whom felt they were required to leave the UK upon graduation, suggest that the emergent anti-immigration socio-political agenda placed significant restrictions on their job opportunities. This in turn raised significant concerns with regards to the financial feasibility of investing in the increasingly costly postgraduate management education in the UK.

5.3.2. Rankings and self-perception

While the relationship between specialised rankings and self-perception was previously explored in the context of the business school academic staff (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Zell, 2001), the student body was largely neglected. Findings here suggest that rankings had a significant impact on students, who mirrored their personal worth through the competition between schools and universities on the ranking lists.

I think it is pretty important to be able to say that you went to school where people actually know about also because I am going back to the US to work and I don't think that they really know about different schools. I have to be able to go back and say I actually went to school that has this and this. So, the rank is more important since you can't really rely on them knowing about the reputation of the school. (Emma)

The way rankings are represented has made them very suitable for the immediate presentation of self-worth to others, most notably employers. By

positioning their individual performance and worth in connection with their school or university position on the rankings, students commensurated themselves into a ranking position to enhance their chances with employers.

Julia: ... people are probably going to look at you differently like: Oh you went there...

Interviewer: So like a reputation thing?

Julia: Yes, it is, isn't it? I mean people go to Harvard or Cambridge and everybody say: Good for you, you must be smart...

As the international reputation of most universities in the UK is not related to a large brand name such as Oxford, Cambridge or LSE, rankings were seen as a suitable reputational substitute. The individual sense of self-worth, thus, became related to the ranking position.

I mean, the lower ranking position sounds really bad, but if you consider there are maybe a thousand MSc programs in the world, it is actually not that bad. (Hanna)

Even in situations when rankings were not favourable, students tended to rationalise them in a positive light, easily switching the focus from the importance of the individual ranking position, to the importance of being ranked in the first place. These transformations were obvious in interviews as the observed programme took a significant fall in rankings over the course of the research. Such rationalisations and manipulations of rankings and the fact that their institution was featured on the list suggests how important rankings were to students as indicators of reputation and worth.

5.3.3. Rankings in service of social mobility

This section explores the uses of rankings in the context of social mobility. As extensively discussed in the literature review, the recent socio-political

changes in educational environment, and the resulting paradigm shift towards service-based educational practices (Le Grand, 2004; Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007) have led to a paradoxical situation. Contemporary issues with access to education shifted from being related to race, gender or social class (Robbins, 1963), towards being grounded in the individual financial situation (Johnson, 2016). The high costs related to this type of education⁹ (easily doubled when living expenses were added, particularly in areas such as London) suggest that postgraduate education in the UK is not necessarily accessible, even for individuals from more affluent backgrounds.

5.3.3.1. The financial implications of rankings

The majority of students participating in the empirical research were self-funded, with only a handful of students benefitting from institutional or governmental funding of their education. Consequently, most students either relied on the financial help from their families, or their savings. Alternatively, some governments financially support postgraduate education of their citizens. In TTBS, there were several examples of students holding national scholarships. Lin, for instance, applied and received a scholarship after a challenging process described below.

Interviewer: What were the requirements for the scholarship?

Lin: GPA, and they checked the CV, and I had to write an essay about how I want to contribute to the country afterwards, things like that. I also went through the interview process, focus group discussions, and we had training as well.

Interviewer: Do they look to rankings of the University that you apply for?

⁹ See Appendix A for a detailed overview of tuition fee levels for a selection of postgraduate management programmes in the UK.

Lin: Yes. They have a list of the universities that I can apply to. I can apply to couple of universities that are in the ranking.

Interviewer: Was it the list of universities or schools, do you remember?

Lin: Universities. (...) I could choose, but they preferred me to get the one that is higher.

Lin chose the university based on rankings provided by the Taiwanese government, which in return granted her a scholarship. Her access to postgraduate education was, therefore, established on the list of universities that were deemed suitable, with the preference to get an admission to the university which is highest possible on the list. Aulia from Indonesia, also a recipient of a scholarship from her government, openly admitted that the scholarship was the only way for her to get an education.

I wouldn't be able to come here, it's too expensive. The currency, for instance. Like, one pound is like 20 units back home, so it's extremely expensive. But the thing is that this scholarship also provides another great opportunity, because if I want to continue to a PhD, they will fund me ... (Aulia)

While both Aulia and Lin were granted scholarships, their potential wishes had very little bearing on the decision of the university. Their ability to decide on what education would be best for them professionally and personally was not only restricted by a limited number of universities on the list, but also the preference to choose the highest ranked university they could. Furthermore, while such rankings share significant similarities with specialised rankings in terms of the reliance on simplification and commensuration, they are usually based on university rankings, or developed in-house by the government agencies responsible for international scholarships.

5.3.3.2. Rankings as socio-cultural signposts

Findings suggest that rankings also play an important role in students' identification of the most appropriate social environment. In this sense, specific rankings were perceived as a type of socio-cultural signposts.

I think once you have a highly ranked university you expect the quality of education to be pretty good. It's expected that professors are one of the best in their field and it gives you a confidence in the program, it makes you feel you're going somewhere that's well structured, and actually will provide you with the knowledge you are seeking. (Nora)

While Nora's account reflects her high expectations from the institution and its staff, her following comment implies the vital role the social environment played in shaping her educational experience.

I would not [suggest] that this university is better, but I think the students who applied to higher ranked universities, or go to these universities, probably have high skills set. And because I don't think you only learn from the business school, from the teachers and professors, but also from other students, I thought that I would get most of it if I would go to one of these highly ranked universities. (Nora)

Building on the popularity of rankings and the nature of their own use of rankings, students assumed others will do the same, thus seeing favourable ranking results as being correlated with the quality of enrolled students. This implies that institutions on different ranking positions attract individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds. A higher ranking is associated with the potential of attracting "better" students, not only in terms of knowledge and intellectual capabilities, but from a higher social class, potentially creating environments that allow students to either keep within their social class or, more importantly, advance into a higher one.

It does feel like a rigorous place to learn, and the quality of students you're learning with, I think, is good. I mean, by knowing people quite well now, where they've come from, where they've studied, I have a feeling that fellow students are very capable and they're attending a top school. (Ciaran)

Following the reasoning that top students attend top universities, students used rankings to identify the point where they are able to, in a sense, “join the club”. In the context of the increasing financial challenges and the limited access to funding in the UK, management education seems to be moving towards a type of ‘educational tourism’. However, the financial constraints in such an environment pose a significant obstacle for potential applicants, particularly the students coming from less affluent backgrounds, or from developing countries which do not financially support the education of their citizens. Or, in many cases, both.

5.4. Relevance of rankings beyond the educational process

During the data collection process, the observed programme was for the first time in several years not included in the Financial Times MSc in Management rankings. This was due to a small number of graduate response which made the programme ineligible for ranking. Contrary to the high publicity usually given to favourable ranking results, TTBS chose not to advertise this unfavourable result. When they were told about this during the interview process, students were surprised to hear their programme was not ranked anymore.

Interviewer: Are you aware that MSc in Management was ranked in Financial Times?

Aarav: Yes, I think it was ranked at [Correct ranking], and saw it on a website at Financial Times rankings.

Interviewer: Yes, you are correct. Do you know where it is now in this years?

Aarav: No.

Interviewer: it dropped out.

Aarav: Really? (surprise)

Interviewer: What do you think about that?

Aarav: Oh my God! (nervous laugh)

In some cases, particularly among students like Aarav who was one of the few who actively used specialised rankings to make their educational decision, this information was received with surprise, but also nervousness that suggest uncertainty regarding how the information should be interpreted.

Interviewer: Do you know the current Financial Times ranking of TTBS?

Savina: No

Interviewer: It was dropped from the list. What do you think about that?

Savina: Now I am here, it's good that this is going to stay confidential because I'm going to start a rant about the business school (laugh). Now that I'm here it kind of makes sense. [...] I don't find [the programme dropping from the list] surprising.

Interviewer: ... the programme actually dropped out because not enough students participated in the survey.

Savina: But the fact they didn't bother participating also tells you something about it.

In some cases, the exclusion of the programme ranking sparked a critique of TTBS and its practices, as the blame was quickly and easily contributed to the institution. Such reaction implies the normalisation of rankings in student perception of management education as a standard that should be upheld, and the failure to do so was seen as an organisational failure to maintain or increase the standard of student life.

... maybe it is stupid thinking, but if I paid for the university and I'm ranking it, there's no point in putting a negative answer. I think this is a smart thing to do, even if maybe it's not the right thing to do. But I don't understand people complaining and putting a poor score in the ranking, because it's a drawback for them in the future. People that put bad score of the class now will feel the consequences of their actions. The university they pay is not in the ranking anymore. (Francesco)

In a number of accounts, students openly advocated for gaming the ranking process. For instance, Francesco explicitly questioned the motives behind graduates failing to see the negative consequences of giving low scores on the rankings and argued that, if rankings were important, graduates should have been smart about how they responded to the questionnaire. Here, the openness of the ranking designs to interpretations, coupled with the active role of students in the creation of rankings, results with the students' openness towards manipulation of ranking results. The ranking information is again secondary: students, who are encouraged through rankings to be smart and approach their educational choice pragmatically, are in return treating rankings in the same way. Seeing the potential benefits of a higher ranking, students insinuated the possibility of gaming the process to enhance their position.

Interviewer: What do you think about your programme dropping the Financial Times rankings? Will it have any consequences for you?

Aarav: I think so. As you already know, it is really hard to get a job in the UK for international students. So, if the criteria of the rankings are based on the number of jobs graduates got, I think this is a consequence. So, yes, the number of jobs which students get after the masters must be lower.

When discussing potential consequences of their programme dropping from the Financial Times rankings, several concerns were raised, largely related to the loss of the positive image of their degree after their graduation, and the

potentially negative implications for their job opportunities. Going back to the students' limited understanding of what rankings represent, concerns were intrinsically related to individual expectations from TTBS and the programme, thus leading to multiple reactions, ranging from indifference, to a very passionate concern.

Well I think it doesn't really have an effect on me. It depends on my value system and based on my value system. I don't really care about the rankings and I also doubt that a lot of companies, employers, recruiters that I consider attractive for myself actually know in that much detail about the rankings. Because, ranking universities is fine but ranking individual department within university is a lot more detailed already. But, then ranking individual programs? How could you even do that? Because I get the feeling it is kind of random which option courses will be offered here anyway. And then, as our program director explained in the first week, the ranking is based on the graduates from 4 years ago and the general setting. I'm not sure if the rankings consider when it comes to starting salary or salary development, if they consider what kind of industry they were in, what is the generally economic setting. I mean, if someone goes to an investment bank and after 4 years gets a hundred thousand, alright. But, if someone starts his own company and makes that really successful, it's just very different things that you can't compare. (Paul)

The unfamiliarity with the design and construction of rankings, and the consequential grounding of the value of rankings in factors not necessarily weighed in the ranking process, lead students towards an array of causes of change in the ranking position. Identified causes – graduates, institution, or the ranking methodology – suggest where students' trust is based on. Francesco's disappointment with graduates was linked with his trust that rankings indicate the quality of graduates. Savina was clearly blaming the institution as she perceives that the quality of education and the experience is what is shown through rankings. Paul dismissed rankings, arguing that the information rankings provided was neither feasible, nor relevant.

5.5. Chapter Discussion

Findings suggest that specialised rankings are not only an intrinsic part of the organisational life in business schools for academic and support staff (Wedlin, 2006; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), but are also increasingly influencing students' educational experiences as well. The initial purpose of specialised rankings to facilitate the creation of the market in which "... schools could be rewarded and punished for failing to be responsive to their two prime constituents: the students and the corporations" (Wedlin 2006: 11) is only partially explored in the reviewed management education literature. With research focusing largely on the organisational responses to rankings (Corley & Gioia, 2000; Wedlin, 2006; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Hazelkorn, 2011), rankings have in this sense been repurposed as a legitimisation and reputation instrument serving business schools.

Considering that specialised rankings such as Financial Times (2017b) rely on student reflections on their experiences three years after graduation, the ranking-related activities of business schools are aimed towards assuring their future movements on the league tables. As such, rankings are perceived as a constant element of organisational life that provokes organisational responses (Espeland & Sauder, 2007) that remain the same (or similar) over time, and follow the rules of 'playing the game' as described by Corley & Gioia (2000).

The student relationship with specialised rankings, however, significantly differs. First, students use specialised rankings to quickly and easily familiarise themselves with the management education market. However, the truthfulness of the ranking information is secondary. Student interest in rankings is based on their power as generators of a specific image that relies on external perceptions of the validity of ranking mechanisms, the user-

friendliness of the results, and the resulting openness of the results to interpretations.

Furthermore, rankings have a significant role in student justification of their educational choices towards themselves and their personal and professional networks. Following the previous point, students utilise the openness of rankings to interpretation, and manipulate the results to assure a favourable perception of their professional value on the job market. In other words, in the representation of themselves to employers, students reduce their professional worth to the position of their school on the league table.

5.5.1. Rankings and the educational choice

Student perceptions of the value of rankings drastically changed from a fairly short period of time of the application process, when students showed the largest interest in them, to their interaction with rankings during their time in the business school. During the application stage, potential students (particularly from international backgrounds) tended to use rankings as a user-friendly and quick way of familiarisation with the unfamiliar management education market.

The simplicity of the league table allows them to identify the suitable places to study with a click of a mouse. Such behaviour bears resemblance to the consumer interaction with a variety of ranking mechanisms, such as TripAdvisor (Jeacle & Carter, 2011; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012) as increasingly influential and trustworthy sources of reputational information. In contrast to models such as TripAdvisor in which the reputational data arises from a direct and unaltered user feedback, the credibility of specialised rankings is also built on a carefully calculated balance between the graduate feedback and the

academic expertise, achieved through a widely advertised methodological rigour (Policano, 2005).

While considered at the forefront of changes towards a commodified, service oriented management education (AACSB, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Wedlin, 2006), specialised rankings did not hold a dominant place in student educational choice. Despite the fact that most students were aware of the economic values in the foundations of specialised rankings, their final choice of education tended not to be based on them. Still, rankings did serve a purpose. Students, who were not familiar with the range of choices, used rankings to easily scope their choice down to a group of schools where they have the best chance to gain adequate educational experience, as well as the adequate return on their investments. As rankings become more specialised and lists grow shorter, students in search of the suitable programme were becoming more interested in the existence of the school on the list itself, and not in the specific position the school held on the list. After the list identified adequate schools, specialised rankings lost their relevance in students' decisions. Instead, students increasingly relied on the information sourced from other sources to make their final decision. The exploration of other sources of reputation on which students tended to base their decisions indicated a number of reasons why students study at a specific school, including the ones not related to formal educational experience such as scientific heritage and tradition, the cultural and the social experiences of studying in the UK, and in a specific place.

Findings also suggest that the existence of the school on the specialised ranking list was seen as indicative of the type and quality of students applying to the ranked programme. The assumption held by the participants is that higher quality students would apply to schools that are either merely ranked,

or ranked highly. For many international students who perceived their postgraduate education as a pathway to international careers, networking was an important element of educational experience. Under the assumption that all potential applicants used rankings to identify the best possible school, students used rankings to identify where all the 'good' students study.

5.5.2. Rankings as tools for shaping the student image

The relatively small role of rankings in student choice, explored in the previous section, raises further questions about other purposes rankings serve for students. The disregard towards specific information that specialised rankings provide seem to be reflective of the failure of rankings to provide information their consumers would find relevant when making their educational choice. Following this, participants had little reason to understand or question how specific rankings are calculated, even when they searched for a suitable business school.

However, a general consensus among the participants was that, while the ranking information provides an oversimplified and unrealistic image of management education and the student experience, it may be relevant for students as an easy-to-use indicator of worth to potential employers. Here, it is important to reflect on the shortfalls in the treatment of education as a commodity (Karpik, 2010; Furedi, 2011; Naidoo, 2003), particularly in the context of its nature as a transformative rather than a transitional process (Barnett, 2007, 2015; Freire, 2005). From this perspective, student discussions on the purposes of rankings implied that they were being ranked along with their institution. In this sense, students considered themselves not mere beneficiaries of the educational process, but an intrinsic and indivisible part of

the educational 'product'. Having this in mind, the student interest in rankings was related to making sure that they provided an appropriate and positive image of the institution and, consequentially, to themselves, and to other stakeholders.

Following this, the popularity and the student use of rankings is based on three features of the device. First, rankings maintain the users' perception of the methodological rigour behind the results. This is particularly important for students who use ranking information to market themselves on the job markets. Second, their simplicity makes rankings user-friendly and attractive to wider audiences. In this sense, the numerical and the hierarchical design of the ranking device is universally recognised and understood. Third, the simplicity of the device allows multiple interpretations of the results, therefore allowing students to manipulate and customise the key message of the ranking information based on their needs and their audiences.

5.5.3. Justification through rankings

Perhaps the most influential role of rankings in student experience lies in its power of justification. In the absence of a strong name of the school or the university, the simple numerical information provided by specialised rankings gave students an opportunity to easily justify their educational choice and the investment to themselves and their social environments. As most students were either self-funded, or relied on their families for financial support, the existence of their school on the league tables offered them the seemingly objective and credible numerical information on the status of the school. As most international participants suggested that their personal and professional networks in their home countries were largely uninformed about

specialised league tables (as opposed to university rankings), ranking results could also be manipulated, as long as the school was indeed represented in the ranking. If the ranking was favourable, the specific position was emphasised; if the ranking was less favourable, the mere existence of the school on the ranking list was presented as being significant. Such behaviour bears similarities to the 'rankings game' played by the business schools, where the institutional image is carefully crafted based on "cherry-picking" through the results of multiple rankings (Gioia & Corley, 2000; Espeland & Sauder, 2007), as well as to the ways organisational identities of academic staff were threatened by the ranking results (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). Similarly, favourable ranking results were utilised by students as means for validating their education and the investment to themselves. It reassured them that their personal, financial and emotional investments were well placed in terms of getting quality education, better employability opportunities, and future financial benefits.

When thinking about the role of specialised rankings in their future lives outside the programme, their influence on the potential employability was seen as minimal among overseas students, and more significant among the Western students. The current anti-immigration policy in the UK, further fuelled by political insecurities in the aftermath of the Brexit vote and triggering Article 50 of the Lisbon Agreement (Parker, Allen & Beesley, 2017), significantly reduces the international students' opportunities to remain in the UK and attempt to find jobs after graduation. At the same time, overseas students maintained that the specialised rankings have a limited influence on employers in their home countries, who value mainly the globally renowned universities such as Oxford and Cambridge or, alternatively, show awareness of the reputational cues provided by the university rankings.

Rankings here play a significant role as engines of student commodification of self. As the educational process in specialised rankings becomes simplified through the reduction of the irreducible to a common metric (Karpik, 2010; Espeland & Stevens, 1998), the student presentation of self – if based on rankings – follows the same principle. In their attempt to excel in the competitive job markets, students draw their inspiration from the artificially created competition among business schools by reducing their education and experience to a particular number, or the mere existence, on the ranking list. For this reason, participants who paid little attention to specialised rankings suddenly felt threatened when their school dropped out the ranking list; without the school being listed on the ranking, students lose this simple reputational measurement they can easily relate to their worth. Such self-objectification represents an important unintended consequence of specialised rankings that potentially implies a significant challenge to higher education envisioned as a process of not only individual emancipation, but also the social progress (Robbins, 1963). It also reflects the increasing dehumanisation in contemporary management education that is in stark contrast with the core values held throughout the history of education and pedagogy (Freire, 2005; McLaren, 2002).

5.6. Chapter Summary

Findings suggest that the student relationship with specialised rankings is multifaceted and changing over the course of the programme. Prior to the beginning of their studies, students were interested in rankings as easy-to-use sources of a simple, hierarchical information which enabled them to quickly scope the previously unfamiliar management education market. Furthermore,

the simplicity of rankings was also utilised by students as means of justification of their educational choices to their social surroundings.

At the same time, students seem to be well aware of the limitations of the information provided by the rankings. Contrary to the assumptions of students as outcome-oriented, financial value maximisers (Grineski, 2000; Johnson, 2016) embedded in specialised rankings, students expectations of their education were more complex. This, coupled with relatively low understanding among students of what rankings measure and how, results with the student reluctance to base their educational decision on rankings. Instead, students relied on other features of the experience, including the location of the school and the opinions gathered from their professional and personal networks. Findings, therefore, suggest that students have little use for rankings when choosing the school.

Following this, the usefulness of rankings is not found in the quality or the relevance of the information they provide. Instead, students find rankings valuable due to their simplicity, the image of methodological robustness, and their openness to interpretations. This implies that rankings represent more to students than indicators of institutional reputation and financial benefits of the degree. Instead, the student use of rankings as tools for shaping their image suggests the indivisibility of the individual students and their educational process (Barnett, 2007). From this perspective, specialised rankings have a significant influence on student commercial perceptions of self as a commodified 'product' of the education, designed for the exchange on the job market.

CHAPTER 6: STUDENTS AND BUSINESS SCHOOL SPACE

This chapter explores the participants' utilisation, interaction and experience of business school space, materiality and design. A combination of interview data, ethnographic observations and secondary data is used to address the research question 1.2: *How is business school space influenced by the marketisation and commercialisation of management education? How do the features of contemporary business school space influence students and their perceptions of their educational experiences?*

Three themes emerged from the findings and comprise the main sections of the chapter. The first section provides a descriptive account of the features of TTBS exterior and interior, and their role in the institutional demarcation from the traditional university settings. Here, TTBS spatial designs suggest a deliberate shift away from the image of the traditional university, and instead propagate the commercial values supporting the consumerist perspective on students. The second theme emerging from this chapter explores the role of TTBS spatial designs in supporting specific power relations between different organisational members, and the resulting differentiation between students and the members of staff.

The third section explores the implications of spatial designs and arrangements on student experiences. The chapter ends with a discussion of the findings, identifying the active role of business school space in differentiation from the traditional university setting. It also explores the implications of the spatial design in student conceptualisation, as well as the student treatment of business schools as temporary spaces of service.

6.1. Making sure we're seen as different: differentiation from the university

TTBS building is situated on one of three university campuses. The building was not purposely built for the business school; it housed other departments before being repurposed for the business school. Developed over the decades, the campus consists of an unusual mix of different architectural styles. TTBS and its recently refurbished and modernised 'bigger sister' building, as well as several other modern buildings and skyscrapers are contrasted by smaller, traditionally designed buildings and houses. All these facilities, along with TTBS, surround one of two central areas that form the campus. The central area is partly a pedestrian zone, and partly a low frequency traffic zone.

During the semester periods, and particularly in times between classes, the area fills with people (mainly students and staff) rushing from one side of the campus to the other. The importance of the central area as a key transition and public space has drawn interest from different social groups. At most times, the passers-by may expect to encounter and engage with marketers offering coupons for fast food restaurants, volunteers of various charities, members of religious institutions, etc. Frequent passers-by are also familiar with the number of beggars, each with their own positions, 'pitches' and customer base. Mobile coffee shops and food vans are placed in front of departments, each in their position.

The campus life, then, is curiously versatile and hectic, shared by people from very different cultural, national, professional, economic and social backgrounds, and is normalised by the routines of its permanent inhabitants, whose day-to-day life intersects with rushing students and staff members.

6.1.1. Architectural features of TTBS

The recent refurbishment of the building in which TTBS is situated was restricted by its grading in the Listed Building list. The original, rectangle-shaped building exterior remained very much the same, albeit with several noticeable changes. A top floor was added, which interpolates the modern, all-glass design with the existing design that alternates stone tiles with rows of window, giving an impression of openness and inclusion. Also, large windows opened up the once windowless ground floor. The impression of inclusion and openness enacted through this simple, but effective design was intended to portray a welcoming and collaborative space. With the inclusion of large glass walls on the ground floor, however, these spaces were largely stripped of privacy from the passers-by. Ground floor offices were, thus, considered as less attractive work spaces, and were designed as offices for student group work, and the administrative offices. The concern for privacy and undisturbed work has resulted with window blinds in most offices being constantly shut. The intended openness and inclusivity through architectural design was, then, short-lived in practice.

Another important change arising from the refurbishment is a cubical aluminium and glass extension of the building positioned in the centre of one of the longer sides of the building, and changing the layout of the building from a rectangle to a T-shape. This solution also allowed the addition of the basement floor, increasing the number of floors from four to six overall. Although the cubical extension was positioned at the back of the building, it was also envisioned as the main entrance to the building. Again, the business school was in this way atypical, with all other buildings that form the campus having their main entrances facing the central campus space. While it was still

possible to enter TTBS from the campus side, this was only possible with a university card. The specific orientation of the business school entrance was repeatedly creating confusion among the business school guests, and the impression of inclusion arising from the architectural design, therefore, was more exclusive in practice.

Apart from the physical layout of the building, efforts of a symbolic differentiation from the university are also found in the decisions behind the building's name. Traditionally, all buildings in the campus were named after renowned scientists and historical figures. While TTBS' building initially carried a name of a renowned 18th Century sociologist (who, incidentally, was a strong critic of the increased influence of commerce on the society), his name was deliberately omitted after TTBS moved in the building. Now widely known as the Business School, it is the only building on the campus known exclusively by the department it houses.

The deviation of TTBS from the university traditions is very much in line with the idea of business schools as institutions distinctively different from others. Perceived by other departments and the public as institutions oriented towards vocational training and without a clear research identity (see Khurana, 2007), business schools tend to position themselves as natural early adopters and drivers of change in higher education (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016). Beneficial market signals (e.g. the increase in numbers of applicants willing to pay increasing fees, good rankings, and accreditations) are interpreted as positive signs of the commercialisation process that inherently requires the described distancing from traditions of an old, 'ivory tower' type of university. In this process, history represented through symbolism becomes burdensome, requiring the demarcation of the business school from the traditional university heritage.

6.1.2. Learning and socialisation spaces

Upon entering the building, visitors and students were greeted by a contemporary and minimalistic interior design uncharacteristic for a university. Large glass surfaces, decorated with vertical blue stripes, dominated the area, functioning both as the exterior walls, and as walls dividing offices from the hallways. Floors were carpeted with grey or blue carpets. Areas with no carpeting were paved with grey stone tiles. The upper areas of the building, accessible via three flights of stairs and an elevator, differ from the entrance areas in terms of keeping with the more traditional university interior designs.

Considering that the focus of the thesis is on postgraduate students, their organisational lives and their experience, and that their socialisation and learning occur mainly on the ground floor, this area will be described in detail. The ground floor contains the main entrance, reception desk and a café, as well as the majority of lecture theatres and computer labs, student meeting rooms, TTBS' library, and public spaces for socialisation and study. Biggest by size, it was designed for postgraduate taught students, their studies and their socialisation, as it contained most of the facilities MSc students might be needing during their studies. This practical feature of the building was considered as positive by some students.

The fact that everything is basically on a one level, lower level, where you have all your classes, cafeteria, everything is on a one level, it makes it easier to interact, makes it easy for people to stay here because they don't feel like just have same one place, but also makes it easier to interact socially, you always know that where your friends are. (Nora)

The dedicated space for PGT students was, in line with the TTBS promise of a multicultural student experience, allocated and designed purposefully to foster social interactions between students on different PGT programmes. Some students, however, felt different. As Chen explained, "... one thing I really don't like is that all of the lectures are contained on the ground floor. I feel like I'm in a basement..." Since the ground level of TTBS is partly dug in, most lecture theatres do not have a source of natural light, as some participants noted: "...the lecture rooms are of high standard, everything is really good and I like that, but still it's really small and dark" (Sofia).

6.1.3. Teaching spaces

While all lecture theatres had a comparably high standard of technology solutions, some followed the standard lecture theatre style. Some utilised the Harvard style design, with students sitting in a semi-circle, while others had a more traditional layout. Comfortable upholstered seats featured foldable trays used for writing or putting a laptop or tablet during the lectures. Their position in the room was fixed, removing the possibility of furniture rearrangement, thus limiting the opportunities for group work. Monochromatic colours were used both for the fabric seat upholstery and the floor. White walls were complemented only with the whiteboard and the projector screen. A particular type of the lecture theatre was introduced only after the recent expansion of TTBS. Conceptualised in the tradition of Harvard style lecture theatres, it featured individual fixed seats, upholstered with grey imitation leather. It contained cutting-edge technology, with an electronic whiteboard installed instead of the traditional one. Only three lecture theatres were designed with multi-purposefulness in mind, as the seats were not fixed. Those theatres were brighter due to large window surfaces, and were furnished with aluminium-

frame chairs upholstered with red fabric or grey leather. These lecture theatres could be arranged and re-arranged in any form, and could accommodate different teaching styles and techniques. All but three lecture theatres in TTBS were purposefully situated on the ground level where students were located.

TTBS library was also discussed by students in different ways. Some like the location and space of the Library: "I think it's good, the fact that [the Library] is in glass and closed makes it easy to understand how busy it is, also to see people you may interact with." (Nora). As a space for work, even the negative characteristics of the Library were considered in a positive light:

I actually prefer that is dark and I don't see the weather outside because I'm just there sitting the whole day from 8 till whatever, and nothing is changing. I don't know is it dark outside, or the sun is shining, or it's raining so that's good. (Sofia)

The largest area of the ground floor was housed in a glass cubic-shaped venue. Glass walls were reinforced by steel beams supporting the structure. This area, used for events and wine receptions, was usually furnished by grey and red imitation leather sofas and coffee tables. The floor was carpeted with grey carpets. During the day this area benefitted from the natural light coming through large glass walls. There was also an upper 'balcony', with additional sofas and coffee tables. The balcony and the small corridor from the central area both lead to the biggest lecture theatre in TTBS, which seats 150 people. Apart from the main theatre and the socialisation area, the ground floor also featured MSc and MBA offices and receptions.

I think there is no flower in the entire building, or at least I didn't notice any. But with the open space and café area it would be nicer to have some tall plants. (Paul)

The ground floor was not decorated with artwork or plants. Instead, the wall by the entrance featured the University logo and the name of TTBS. The only other decorations on the walls were large flat screen TVs providing students, the staff and the guests with an array of school-related information, from media ranking positions to guest speaker events. In times of events when TTBS was visited by academics, professionals, politicians, donors, and other members of the general public, the socialisation area featured stand-alone posters. The content of these posters usually included general information on TTBS, including its triple accreditation. Course-related information was almost exclusively related to MBA and Executive MBA programmes, suggesting TTBS' assumptions regarding the interests of the audience coming to these events. Along with the external guests, these events were generally visited by MSc and PhD students and a small group of academic staff.

6.2. Power relations in TTBS

As other higher education buildings, TTBS was designed with efficiency in mind. Due to its limited size, it houses only postgraduate students, while undergraduates are scattered around the campus. As mentioned before, such division resulted in some participants feeling isolated from a significant part of the community. Apart from visiting the administration office and a small space on the 1st floor, furnished with three round tables and ten chairs, over 1000 undergraduate students had no other reason for visiting TTBS. Their access to the building was also limited, as their student cards did not grant access to the building after hours.

I think it's built for the purpose or at least it sends a message that it's been built and conceived for the purpose of separating people into different groups. I mean, that's evident in all of the lecture theatres that are purely made for lectures, not for group discussions. And in

separating MBAs and PhDs and postgrads and not even giving undergrads access to the building, it's obvious. (Paul)

The separation of organisational members continued within TTBS as well. Depending on the type of their programmes, students were physically separated by being situated on different floors. Lower ground and ground floors were envisioned both as spaces dedicated for postgraduate students and as spaces for events and guest lectures. Both open-plan spaces were very vibrant, with high frequency of students and visitors. MBA students occupied the first floor of TTBS, where they enjoyed a dedicated lecture theatre and meeting rooms. PhD students occupied the central space on the second and the third floor of the building.

The allocation of space to TTBS' staff followed a strict hierarchical structure usually found in corporate environments, with some deviations arising from the size limitations of the building. On the whole, the staff allocation followed their status in TTBS. Support staff generally occupied lower floors, with top floor being dedicated to TTBS' management, spaces for staff socialisation and executive meeting rooms. While the academic staff was located throughout the building, the majority of the offices were located on the upper floors.

6.2.1. The hierarchical separation between organisational members

The way space was designed and organised in TTBS was characterised by a hierarchical differentiation between different organisational groups through physical separation and spatially induced power relations between different organisational members. Academic staff, including research students, occupied the upper floors in TTBS, with the school management situated on the top floor. Postgraduate taught students, on the other hand, occupied the

ground and the basement floors, and undergraduate students were entirely detached from the business school space.

I feel really isolated from the undergrads, I never see them. [...] I wonder is there an intention to separate us. (Chen)

I think generally there is very little encouragement to actually expand your network, which I think is very sad because I could also learn from undergraduate business student because I did engineering for my first degree, and we just touched on the business issues. Never mind students doing something separate but still relevant to business. And MBA, PhD, the vertical integration should be better. (Paul)

Apart from the functionality arising from clustering organisational members according to their positions/requirements, placing postgraduate taught students on the 'shop floor' indicates the duality of their position in the organisation, holding simultaneously the internal and the external position at the intersection between the organisational member and the customer. It also indicates the hierarchical nature of the power relations within the business school, and lecturers who descend from the upstairs are seen not only representative of knowledge and learning; they also hold the power over students as bearers, and adjudicators, of work.

A clear physical separation and the resulting power relations between the organisational members was reflected in the student experience of TTBS' space, particularly in their sense of not belonging in certain parts of the building. In this sense, clearly defined physical barriers and the power relations represented in them result with the implicitly subservient position of students as outsiders to the organisational life. Another significant indicator of the staff members' positions in the hierarchy was the design of the offices and the doors. Open-plan spaces for students (PhD and PGT students) were characterised by glass walls exposing the students to corridors and the

stairwell. Support staff offices were characterised by open-plan offices with three or more occupants, with wooden doors with a glass window. Finally, the academic staff offices were designed for single occupant, and full wooden doors with no windows guaranteed privacy of the occupier. While some maintained an open-door policy, most academics tended to work behind closed doors.

Interviewer: Do you think that the facilities could be set up differently to allow for more interaction?

Mia: Definitely. Yes. I mean, PhD's have a cafeteria. Do they share it with the staff?

Interviewer: Yeah

Mia: That's the only way we realise that we are not as important, I guess. Because otherwise, you know, professors are really nice to us.

The way organisational space is designed and utilised in TTBS enforces the hierarchical structure which physically separates both the different types of students, and the student population from academic staff. Such separations can be seen as a result of the functional allocation of resources and enhance the flow of organisational members by placing PGT students as the largest cohort on the ground floor. However, with MBA students situated on the first floor, PhD students at the second and the third floor, and undergraduate students outside the building, PGT students located on the ground floor can get a sense of their position within the organisational structure of TTBS.

6.2.2. Differentiation between students and other organisational members

The outcomes of the hierarchical structure presented in the previous section are reflected in how students experienced the situations when physical and relational barriers were overstepped. Such situations occurred when students

who, as mentioned before, largely spent their time on the ground floor, needed to visit other floors.

I actually have no idea what is on other floors upstairs. I've been to some lecturers' office and to the MBA suite for a special course, but other than that... (Paul)

While students in general felt comfortable on the ground floor, this changed when visiting the upper floors. Since students rarely had the need to visit upper floors, they generally reported unease when going there.

When I first been there I was thinking: Am I allowed to be here? For a few minutes, but since nobody said you're not allowed here and there is no signs I'm not allowed here... (Lukas)

This unease was further perpetuated by multiple student accounts of students being informed that they were not allowed to visit upper floors. Due to the expansion project during their studies, some students were at times forced to use the facilities on the first floor. Others, however, never had a need to go upstairs, and the mystery of the 'upstairs' remained.

No, I don't go upstairs since there are only rooms for lecturers, supervisor, professors and PhD students. What else is there? I think nothing. So I'll go there if I have problem [...] It's really dark upstairs, and I think they also have PhD people there. Maybe it's good for you because you can concentrate, on the other hand we are wondering what's upstairs. (Sofia)

The physical separation between organisational members within TTBS, therefore, also lead to social separation, enabling the grouping of members into smaller subsections of the organisation. Paradoxically, the emphasis TTBS puts on networking and socialisation among students was affected by its insistence on such corporate separation. Students who noticed this issue, both in interviews and during observations, invited for a wider integration between

different types of students, both towards MBAs and PhDs and towards undergraduate students.

6.3. The role of space in shaping student experience

The environment in TTBS was perceived by students as 'office-like', 'corporate' and 'institutional', and was considered as unusual and unexpected in the university context. As one of the participants remarked, "I don't think I would expect this to be a business school. I would expect it to be [situated] in an old building, nothing modern." (Nora). While TTBS space featured state-of-the-art infrastructure and resources, participants argued that the resulting environment is 'cold', 'clinical' and 'unwelcoming'. As such, the TTBS' space differed from other university spaces which, by large, featured a more welcoming and warm environment, but were inferior in terms of functionality and infrastructure. As one of the participants, whose prior studies took place in a different department of the university, noticed:

... [when] you think of the business school when you sit at home, you think of that building. [...] So it does shape my idea and my conceptualisation of what the school is. (Chiara)

The differentiation from the university and the academic life, while perhaps influencing the applicants, also had an impact on how students perceived their institution and, consequently, themselves as members of the institution. The significance of spatial design and architecture was significant here. TTBS space was an important element of student perception of not only what the school *does*, but also of what the school *is*. It represented their experience and learning, and the very reason why they were there. Tradition, then, plays a significant role, and students recognised the differences between the business school and the rest of the university.

Commercial. It's typically commercial. I am a very big fan of old buildings. When I've seen some of the [traditional] university buildings here, I was overwhelmed and I thought, yeah, this is where people study. Here, I think it's nice, posh. In that way I think it looks very modern, it gives it a good appeal. But, yeah, it's very commercial, I think it's the first thing I think when I look at it. (Anaya)

The designs traditionally related to university spaces (especially in universities with longer tradition) was associated to studying, learning and being a university student, but also to tradition and permanency. The modern, corporate take on the architecture and the interior design of TTBS did not seem to generate such associations among students.

I don't think I would expect this to be a business school because if I didn't know anything about the university. I would expect it to be an old building, anything modern at all. (Nora)

Coming from the perception of the necessity to differentiate business schools from the traditional university values, student expectations of the business school design seemed surprising. As management students, they were expected to appreciate the commercial environment created through spatial design for them, but only some of them did.

It feels like quite professional environment because it's quite modern so this clearly mean the schools put their money in it to look good, feel good and feel quite modern, which I think from student perspective is good. (Patrick)

The representation and impression of wealth was perceived as important, particularly in the context of student consumers. Patrick, one of several students from the UK has repeatedly stated his view of the degree as a stepping stone to a new career, and other students with similar inclinations tended to support his view. Hanna, for instance, suggested that the material characteristics of the campus reflected the university expenditure trends:

I think you always have to see compared to what is around. Obviously there is that old tower which looks like it should be brought down ages ago, and the library doesn't look really modern, and you have these old houses and it's pretty obvious those old houses are not where they put their money. I think they are charming and in a way beautiful, but it doesn't come as surprise that they teach religion there. But I like it. (Hanna)

Such views reflect the organisational efforts to differentiate and provide students with an enjoyable service. Such differentiations, however, also reflected the increasing wealth gaps between different departments. Taking a lead from the features of their space, students assumed the worth of different degrees through a financial lens. Following the TTBS' expression of wealth in its design, student formed the impression of being more worthwhile than other degrees. In other words, the sentiment shared by many students was that the financial strength of the business school, compared to other departments, suggested superior relevance of studying business related studies.

I'm not trying to be mean, but business schools are always cash cows of the university; it's the same everywhere. (Chen)

Because it always happens that the business school, everywhere in the world, always have the newest, most modern buildings. (Aulia)

From this perspective, the modern and new designs of business schools did not come as a surprise to students in the light of the premium tuition fees they were required to pay. The inequality emerging from the comparison of the wealth represented by different departments in their organisational spaces, led to othering of non-business related studies by some of the management students.

The wealth that is in this building makes the school seem particularly prestigious compared to other schools [...] I mean it's the infrastructure

and also the position. Having a building close to the library is again quite a prestigious position cause no other department is that close to the library. So, in terms of location, that just makes it seem much more prestigious. (Chiara)

The design and the location of the school was also seen as favourable in the context of its position within the university. TTBS was considered a special, unique and prestigious school, as it attracted more funding. Strong trends towards differentiation of TTBS from the university in terms of its architecture and design, therefore, had significant influence not only on the potential applicants, but also on current students. They conceptualised the perception of their school, their educational development and their student identity in relation to the values represented through TTBS design and its differentiation from the rest of the university. By being situated in a modern, well equipped building with a distinctive corporate 'feel', TTBS and, consequentially, its members, became important, prestigious, and different from the rest of the university.

6.4. Chapter Discussion

This section represents the discussion of the findings and their situation within the academic literature. Here, student accounts are discussed in the context of their experiences and interactions with the organisational space while studying at TTBS. Space is here chosen as a theoretical and empirical lens as the recent changes in its design are increasingly noticed as being reflective of the commercial values found at the basis of specialised rankings. Moreover, space, while often neglected in management education, is increasingly seen as an implicit, but at the same time highly political, active and formative element of organisational life (Lefebvre, 1991; Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2008).

First, space is placed in a relation to the changing context in which management education takes place, in which business schools are increasingly formulating their image in line with the expectations on the market (Alvesson, 2013). Here, space is utilised to demarcate the nature of management education from the traditional university practices and environments by emphasising the student consumer experiences through corporate-like social and material settings.

In the second part, the role of space is discussed in the context of student conceptualisations of education. Findings suggest that the wealth of the institution is reflected in the design and the utilisation of business school space. Such features of TTBS settings influenced the student conceptualisation of their education, particularly in comparison to other departments of the university. Finally, the third part of this section furthers the exploration of the implications of corporatized business school spaces on student experiences. Here, it explores the changing engagement of students with their learning space, and the emergence of the student view on business schools as temporary spaces of service.

6.4.1. Organisational spaces as engines of differentiation

Before exploring the student experiences of organisational space, it is necessary to explore the organisational responses to the commercialisation of management education, reflected in organisational spaces. To do so, it is important to explore the complex and at times challenging relationship between the universities and business schools (see Khurana, 2007), in which teaching and research practices in business schools were often scrutinised as balancing a thin line between being a part of the university environment and

being on the outside of it. In their response, business schools have for decades assumed a position of a follower. However, with the rise of commercialisation, this leader-follower relationship has been reconfigured: in the redefined relationship in the wake of commercialisation, the market values once seen as representative of business schools, are increasingly seen as favourable by the universities as well (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016).

At the same time, the design characteristics and the ways space is organised and utilised tends to suggest the increased differentiation of business schools from the traditional norms and values held within the universities. Through its design, TTBS complies to a position of a higher education institution on a highly competitive management education that is characterised by the delivery of a high quality educational service, with an emphasis of delivering well developed, *plug-and-play* graduates to the global labour market. To do so, TTBS nurtures a rigid environment that implicitly underplays the characteristics and values of education that may be seen as negative or challenging to students and applicants (Grineski, 2000; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; Furedi, 2011). Moreover, the way space is organised and designed reflects a key focus on providing students with an environment that supports their development and preparation for the corporate world. Here, the design of the organisational space plays three distinctive roles from the student perspective.

At the first glance, it provides functionality and support for the educational process, and mediates socialisation among students. At the same time, organisational space caters to the requirements of students as informed consumers of educational services (Johnson, 2016; Grineski, 2000; Sauntson & Morrish, 2011; Naidoo, 2003; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). Socio-material practices in service of students, such as reception desks, information

screens and concierge-type bells, all aim to assure the favourable post-experience feedback in league tables (Wedlin, 2006; Hazelkorn, 2011), thus influencing new cohorts of applicants. The nature of such practices is also characterised by the top-down power relations (Lefebvre, 1991; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Taylor & Spicer, 2007) that characterise corporate environments, through a prescriptive hierarchical separation that is not intended to be disrupted.

Third, organisational space is designed to manage student expectations of the 'real world', and to reflect the importance of acclimating to corporate symbolism and power relations (Dale & Burrell, 2008), implicitly represented in the technology, materials and colour palettes used in interior design, and more explicitly in the material representations of the corporate identity seen, for example, in mission and vision statements, or the representation of external professional organisations on ceiling-mounted boards.

6.4.2. The role of space in student conceptualisation of management education

The importance of the resulting organisational environment for student experience is strongly represented in student accounts. At first, space was seen, and praised, for its functionality: characteristics ranging from cleanliness, dedicated learning spaces, and technology at the student disposal were all seen as favourable features of TTBS. Conceptually, however, space also emerged as a crucial factor in student conceptualisation of their education and their experiences. The corporate environment was by some seen as favourable as a sign of prestige and wealth, representative of the social status initially implied in the specialised rankings.

Compared to other departments in the university, the wealth of the business school space inferred the importance of its scholarship and, ultimately, the education it provides. Such sentiment of superiority, however, furthered the alienation from other parts of the university and their practices that were seen as less impactful or lucrative. While the corporate environment in TTBS was perceived by the students as representation of wealth and functionality, space was at the same time seen as clinical, cold and alienating.

While the functionality and the fit-for-purpose design was appealing from the perspective of student-consumers, its design, characterised by the use of materials such as aluminium and glass, and coupled with monochrome colour palettes and little to no décor, was perceived as bleak and uninviting after spending prolonged periods of time in the building.

6.4.3. Business schools as temporary spaces of service

Following the arguments made in the literature review (Lefebvre, 1991; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Beyes & Steyeart, 2011), the interplay of physical attributes, power and lived experiences is in this discussion treated as being analytically indivisible. The data gathered through observations, participant observations and interviews suggest that, in contrast to the expectations of openness, malleability and student “ownership” of their learning spaces (Hill et al, 2010), TTBS space was surprisingly unmalleable. From the organisational perspective, commercial values behind the design of organisational space were reflected in the clear separation of staff and student spaces (Nespor, 1994), as well as in the treatment and conception of the student space as a space with characteristics similar to a shop floor. As students, they were welcome to use and enjoy high quality facilities and resources that

support their education. However, the power relations represented in the inflexibility of space produced both visible and invisible boundaries, confining students-consumers to their designated spaces using little in terms of physical restrictions and instead relying on a clear, but implicit communication through symbolism and practicality (Lefebvre, 1991).

Conversely, students tended to perceive the inflexibility and the commercial context of their space only through qualitative properties they gave to the space. At the same time, the values represented in its space made TTBS environment being perceived less as a higher education institution, and more as the place of work. While this point will be discussed at length in the next chapter, here it suggests the lack of student active engagement with the space. The characteristics of the environments in business schools, therefore, increasingly move away from being life spaces or, more precisely, learning spaces (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) towards being temporary spaces of service, characterised by the functional and pre-programmed environments, and a passive and impersonal interaction with its users. The commercial designs of the business school space and the values represented in it, therefore, serve the purpose of dampening the active engagement of students with their space and the top-down power relations within the institution, as such engagement would be in conflict with the prescriptive, fragmented and outcome-oriented nature of the intensive educational programme.

The power of the design of organisational spaces in the conceptualisation of student experience becomes even clearer when a contrasting example is given, such as Building 20 at MIT. The phenomenon of Building 20, envisioned as a temporary building during World War II, reflects the importance of student ownership of their learning spaces and its impact on the student development and academic excellence (Hill et al, 2010). It shows how creativity and

innovation are indeed intertwined with the design and utilisation of organisational space, as well as how freedom is related to the values instilled through organisational space. While findings suggest that the organisational spaces in TTBS and, similarly, other commercialised business schools are undeniably characterised by functional designs that cater to the needs of student-consumers, such prescriptive functionalism also dampens the educational experience as an inherently active and messy process.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

The findings presented in chapters five and six revolved around the student experiences in the context of specialised rankings and organisational spaces as instruments of mediation between management education environment, the organisational settings, and the students. So far, both contexts reflect the commercial values embedded in the contemporary management education in different ways and in different time periods, albeit with some overlaps. While specialised rankings seem to have fulfilled their purpose by creating and supporting management education markets (Wedlin, 2006), their significance as informational tools for students remains limited. Still, due to the overarching effect of the commercial values represented in the rankings on socio-material practices in business schools playing the rankings game (Corley & Gioia, 2000), their influence is implicitly reflected in the student experience in business schools. The conception of students as consumers (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011) in the foundations of recent policy developments (Johnson, 2016), and reflected in the institutional compliance to market values (Wedlin, 2006; Espeland & Sauder, 2007) is at the same time also reflected in the institutional treatment of students in corporatised business school spaces.

What remains to be explored are the implications of such environments on students during their studies. In the following section, three distinctive types of student experiences are identified in the data as being dominant among current management postgraduate students during their studies: (1) learning experience, (2) consumer experience, and (3) the workplace experience. This classification, however, should not be seen as a yet another attempt to either explore the benefits of role-playing in the context of action learning (e.g.

Baranowski & Weir, 2010), or classify and label characteristics that make students 'good' (e.g. Karakitsiou et al, 2012). Following Freire's (2005) critique of the banking concept of education, the centrality of student position is assumed here: their experiences in the business school remain their own, and are merely captured and represented in the empirical data and theorised within the literature.

7.1. Learning experience

Despite significant changes in management education over the past decades from substance to image (Gioia & Corely, 2002; Alvesson, 2013), learning remains one of the dominant elements of student experience in all phases of their process. While respondents readily discussed at length the importance of knowledge, understanding and personal growth as concepts that are, in their view, very much self-evident, their meanings tend to significantly fluctuate in different periods of student educational experience.

As the market competition increasingly pressures business schools to standardise the educational processes (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011), students had very little time to reflect on their experience during their studies. The standardised frame of the postgraduate programme reflects the policy pressures towards educational outputs (Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016) by providing an educational environment based around a series of deadlines and timeframes, emphasising educational outputs rather than educational outcomes (Parker, 2003; Willmott, 1995). In such an environment, students were able to sensibly reflect on their experience only towards the end of the programme and, possibly, at a time well after graduation. A similar principle is perhaps unintentionally reflected in the specialised rankings methodologies that consider the student responses three years after graduation in an attempt

to capture the changes in the financial performance of graduates over time (Financial Times, 2017). Students' initial conceptualisation of their learning experience was also influenced by business school space characterised by the materialisation of images and symbols (Dale & Burrell, 2008) of the corporate world that awaits them after their studies.

The marketing-led organisational image of output-focused, value-for-money educational product (Gioia & Corely, 2002; Alvesson, 2013), along with specialised rankings and the organisational space, focus the attention of new students on what comes after education, towards the exchange value of their degree (Willmott, 1995). As a result, the motivations behind student learning at the beginning of their studies were very much related to the extrinsic benefits of a postgraduate degree, such as enhanced employability and professional development. Such focus on educational outputs has had a significant impact on the participants' conceptualisation of knowledge and understanding: knowledge was perceived as a finite, defined, measurable and, above all, an unambiguous truth that is mechanically accumulated for assessment purposes (Freire, 2005).

Such perspectives of learning, however, tend to change over time. The initial expectations of a straightforward process leading to a degree and employability (Grineski, 2000), changed into the appreciation for the exposure to new areas of knowledge and, ultimately, new possible professional directions, but also raised the uncertainty with regards to potential consequences of these changes on student future. Such insecurities, reflected throughout the empirical data, seem to particularly be experienced by the participants in the later stages of the programme, suggesting a moment in which the educationally induced confusion intersects with a world that inherently demands clarity and order. It is important to note that the existence

of such uncertainty and confusion among students suggests that the power of education as a formative and humanising process (Freire, 2005; Barnett, 2007, 2015) remains unchanged in the context of the changing purpose and values of higher education.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe the student attitudes towards some elements of the educational process as they change over time. A good example was the student attitude towards multiculturalism which, once seen as an obstacle to achieving satisfying outcomes, over time transformed into a highly praised educational outcome. This suggests a shift not only in student perspectives on the values behind their education and their programme, but also in their worldviews and social relationships. In other words, the sense of security that is represented in the consumerist perspective of the output-based education dissolves through the individual emancipatory shift in focus on education outcomes.

Herein lies a significant critique of the approach to specialised rankings in academic research, where they are treated largely as factors influencing institutions (Wedlin, 2006; Espeland & Sauder, 2007). The commercial perspectives on learning that are embedded in specialised rankings (Corley & Gioia, 2000) provoke the institutional reactions (Espeland & Sauder, 2007) that, in turn, remain immobilised in the support of consumerism. As the student perceptions of learning change over time, the static nature of the business school's setting becomes a source of student concern and even discontent towards both the process and the institution.

Such change in student attitudes was seen not only in the general attitude towards the course and the school, but also in the change of attitude towards specific elements of the education, including assessment practices. As time passed, marks became seen less and less as adequate representations of

learning, but as a 'necessary evil' that has a practical use on the labour market. As a result, participants showed surprisingly little consideration for marks as indicators of educational excellence towards the end of their time in TTBS, and instead perceived them as impersonal and mechanical outputs of their formal learning. In other words, as numerical representations of student educational performance, marks serve a purpose of functional self-objectification for the purpose of succeeding on the labour markets and, therefore, bear similarities to specialised rankings. A key difference, however, lies in the nature of the measurement: rankings measure the student perspectives of their customer experience in relation to the reputation of the institution and the quality of service (Wedlin, 2006), and marks measure the individual academic performance. While their use is potentially similar in the labour markets, marks remain a very personal piece of information that students are reluctant to share with others. This is nicely seen in the empirical data, where international students praised the UK assessment system as they reflected on their usually negative experiences in other educational systems in which marks were not anonymised.

To conclude, with the rise of consumerist perspectives on management education, the student learning experience becomes increasingly obfuscated, both from the student and the institutional perspectives. Here, institutions hold a pivotal position of carefully balancing their commercial strategies and their responsibilities as education institutions. While findings suggest that, in the specific case of TTBS, this balance seem to be fairly successfully struck (and reflected in, at times, poor results in specialised league tables), the analysis also suggests the existence of the relationship between the commercialisation of education and the standardisation of the educational processes, and the

immobilisation of business school practices in catering to student-consumer needs.

7.2. Consumer experience

The consumer perspective has in recent years become easily the most dominant approach to postgraduate student population in higher education (Delucchi & Smith, 1997; Tomlison, 2016; Nixon, Scullion & Hearn, 2016). In this section, the discussion is led in the context of growing calls for exploration of the student consumer experiences in a response to commercialisation of higher education, and the rise of the consumerist perspective on students on the policy and the institutional levels (Marshall, Fayombo & Marshall, 2015; Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2016).

In the Introduction chapter of the thesis it is argued that the introduction of tuition fees in the UK in 1998 (Dearing, 1997) and the creation of management education markets mediated by specialised rankings (Wedlin, 2006) have until recently been represented in public policy as the natural development of the system driven by the desire to enhance student experience and emancipation (Browne, 2010). With the recent Johnson Report (2016), however, students were for the first time explicitly represented in the UK Government White Paper as customers of educational services. This shift in the policy discourse is significant, as it legitimises the organisational identification of their clients as consumers above students, and encourages students to approach their education from the customer perspective (Browne, 2010).

The concerns raised by Marshall, Fayombo & Marshall (2015) that the students' consumerist perspectives of selves and their experiences are related to the introduction of tuition fees is well supported among the respondents,

particularly towards the beginning of the programme. While postgraduate studies in business schools are among the most expensive programmes at the UK universities, tuition fees seem to be somewhat invisible and abstract to students, therefore, having little influence on student consumer experience in day-to-day practices. However, as discussed in previous sections, consumerism is also increasingly reflected in organisational practices and business school spaces, thus affecting the social environments and the hidden curriculum in business schools (Margolis, 2001; Eisner, 1985). In this sense, students' consumer experience reflects the consumer-oriented attitude of business schools towards students. More specifically, findings suggest that consumer experience is influenced by (1) the differentiation from traditional university through design and characteristics of organisational space, (2) the empowerment through consumer rights, and (3) the co-creation of education.

The corporate-like designs of the socialisation and educational spaces, coupled with service-like features such as technologies and staff dedicated to serve students' needs and requirements, create the consumer-provider relationship between the business schools and their students (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011). In this sense, commercialisation has had a positive impact on student experience, as they enjoy unprecedented levels of support and access to information. At the same time, business schools' efforts to differentiate from the traditional university environment drove the student perceptions of the superiority of their education process in comparison to others. In other words, business schools' wealth (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004) is seen as an indicator of the purposefulness and the commercial, exchange value (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004) of management education.

As the commercialisation assumes and requires increased accountability for the happiness of student-consumers (Nixon, Scullion & Hearn, 2016), business

schools show an increased interest in student opinions and views (Jones-Devitt & Samiei, 2011). Such views are strongly supported in the political discourse surrounding the UK higher education, with the current legislator's decision to put "students at the heart of its higher education reform strategy" through increased focus on informed choice and increased competition among providers. (Johnson, 2016: 11). In legislative practice, this focus means not only the increased accountability of universities and business schools for students' experience, but also introduces the consumer protection for students.

Such empowerment of students implies their active role in co-creation of their experience (Lengnick-Hall & Sanders, 1997). Findings suggest that in this context students increasingly felt that they share the responsibility for what their education entails, and how it is delivered. In the era of commercialisation, education is seen as a commodity jointly co-created by institutions, teachers and the students, and students felt the obligation to raise their concerns with educational and organisational practices that they perceived as difficult, inefficient or undesired.

At this point it is important to note that the discussion so far is not intended to question the appropriateness of student-consumer perspective of education; the findings clearly suggest the versatility of reasons why students study, and the human choice to be educated does not (nor should) require any specific justification. However, the idolisation of consumer experience that lies in the centre of commercial management education, requires scrutiny. Studying and learning inherently entail difficulty, transformation and effort that is not necessarily evident before or during the process. The empowerment of students-consumers as active co-creators of their education, therefore, has a potential to undermine the quality of the educational process and the student learning experience. In other words, the tensions between the student learning

experience and customer experience must be carefully managed, and business schools need to refrain from *ad hoc* reactions to fleeting student wishes.

7.3. Workplace experience

As previously stated, one of the key interests behind this thesis is the exploration of student experiences, and the discovery of novel phenomena was expected due to the exploratory nature of the empirical study. One such discovery was the emergence of the workplace experience among participants during their studies, defined as student perceptions of themselves as employees in the workplace environment. The truly surprising element during the empirical study was the way how these experiences, largely unrecognised in the academic discussions exploring management education, were reported by almost all participants, as well as many other students the researcher was in contact with during the participant observations and informal encounters. Empirical findings suggest that the student workplace experience emerged from the equalisation of the activities, experiences and pressures of studying in TTBS with the activities, experiences and pressures found in the workplace. Three key elements that add to such equalisation are: (1) the characteristics of the organisational space, (2) the resulting social environment and, (3) the standardised educational practices.

The influences of the commercialisation on organisational spaces in business schools have been explored in detail elsewhere in this chapter, and are only summarised here. In contrast to the flexibility and malleability of traditional university spaces (Nespor, 1994, Hill et al, 2010), business school spaces are characterised by the innate inflexibility arising from the commercial designs and the prescriptive utilisation of space. This, combined with the dominant focus on student customer experience, and the reciprocal student assumption

of the consumer role, transforms the business schools from learning spaces (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) to temporary places of service. Furthermore, commercialised business schools aim to cater to student-consumer needs by providing them with corporate-like environments which, apart from the functionality, also emulate the generic workplace environments. In this way, space is used to help students grasp the values and the practices shared by the corporate environments (Dale & Burrell, 2008) for which they are being prepared. Also, work-specific language and behaviours develop in such environments: essays become projects, group works become meetings, learning spaces become offices, etc.

Findings, however, suggest that the environment itself is not enough to explain the emergence of workplace experience. As previously discussed, the standardised postgraduate management education is an intensive process characterised by an extensive number of deliverables (essays, exams, reports), and the fragmentation of the curriculum into a number of smaller projects, each with tight schedules. At the same time, structures of many courses follow the action-learning approach, i.e. revolve around team work and 'real-life' problems and projects in controlled environments. Such approach to curriculum delivery requires students to work constantly, and participants all report employing a strict work routine to tackle the heavy workload, most of them using TTBS as the workplace.

The routinisation and fragmentation of the education process, coupled with the workplace environment emulated in business school space, is reflected in student experience as the lines between the work and learning became increasingly blurred. As a result, students perceived their experience as being divided in the periods of employment, or the time of studying and work on formal deliverables, and the periods of student life, when they were free to

explore beyond the curriculum. The embeddedness of the student-employee role in the everyday school life also inevitably lead to the emergence of work-related emotions, which were often in tension with learning. The business school became experienced as a place of work in a sense that participants hoped to get out of after the day's work was done. Such alienation from the learning environment is in contrast to the learning-related expectations of exploration, and the desire for learning for the sake of learning. Furthermore, the student educational life is replaced with the professional life, thus creating clear temporal and physical boundaries between the personal and professional lives, such as clear 9-to-5 routines, 'ownership' of specific workplaces, socialisation exclusively within the cohort and only outside the business school, etc.

7.4. Chapter summary

Set against the theoretical points made in the literature review, this chapter explored the emergence of three distinctive sets of student experiences, their features, and the tensions between them. First, it explored the student learning experiences and the transformation of student interest in exchange value of education (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004), to its transformative value for the personal and professional development (Barnett, 2007; 2015). By diluting the student sense of security and guiding them towards uncertainty, this transformation is set against the prescribed, linear and image of education as a process with a single purpose, embedded in specialised rankings and consumerism represented in organisational space. The chapter continues with the exploration of student consumer experiences dominating the institutional treatment of students. Consumerist approaches to students and their educational experience are very much supported in the UK public policy

(Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016), and are deeply embedded in ranking devices, and in the design and use of business school spaces.

Findings suggest that student consumerist experiences emerged from the institutional emphasis on practical, purposeful knowledge underlying the institutional image and marketing practices, the empowerment of students through consumer rights, and the resulting student expectations of an active role in co-creation and customisation of the educational processes. Finally, the third set of experiences reflect the students' perceptions of education and the educational settings in the context of work. These experiences emerged from the institutional treatment of students as customers, whose interests lie in enhancing their professional potential and chances on the labour market (Grineski, 2000; Naidoo, 2003). Following this, business schools cater to student consumers by providing corporate-like environments and educational processes that emulate the world of work. The resulting workplace set of experiences provides a significant factor in student conceptualisation of education, its value, and its purposes.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore the changing roles and purposes of higher education in the light of commercialisation and commodification of its practices. Its aim was to build on and extend the inquiry beyond the reactive discussions on the challenges brought by the changing political discourse in higher education over the past decades (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007; Le Grand, 2009), and instead focus on the fundamental questions (Collini, 2012) of how these changes are reflected in the student perceptions and experiences. To do so, management education and business schools have been identified as a suitable context for such study due to their position at the forefront of the changes related to marketisation and commercialisation (Gioia & Corley, 2002; Khurana, 2007; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016), namely the commodification and standardisation of its activities (Welch, 1988; Furedi, 2010; Ball, 2004; Willmott, 1995), the increasing focus on consumerism (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and the resulting reliance on corporate-like organisational image (Alvesson, 1990; 2013; Gioia & Corley, 2002).

A particular focus was placed on postgraduate management students as a specific example of the student demographic experiencing the most benefits and shortcomings of commercialisation. As discussed in the Introduction chapter, postgraduate management education in the UK accounts for around 50% of total management education degrees (Universities UK, 2016). In terms of the cost of education, management education is among the most expensive postgraduate degrees on offer in the UK. Moreover, management education attracts a large number of international students coming from a wide variety of backgrounds. Finally, business schools, as primary providers of management education are at the centre of the changes experienced by the

entire higher education sector (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016). This is particularly the case in the context of the customer-service provider model of education (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011), reflected in the proliferation of rankings as indicators of performance and legitimacy, and in the implicit or hidden (Margolis, 2001; Eisner, 1985, Bregar Golobič, 2012) symbolism of corporatized business school organisational spaces, that are both deeply rooted in the exchange value of education (Willmott, 1995; Ball, 2004).

A multiple-point ethnographic empirical study was conducted with MSc in Management students as key participants. The conducted fieldwork reflected the exploratory nature of the study, and was conducted in a period of one academic year using three distinctive research methods: participant observations and informal interviews, group interviews, and individual semi-structured interviews. By addressing each of the posed research questions, the thesis reveals new and important insights into the field of management education, and makes important contributions to academic debates surrounding management education. Furthermore, this doctoral research also contributes to a wider discussion on the fundamental challenges facing contemporary higher education. The analysis of the findings also offers some practical implications for business schools and other higher education institutions that are interested in better understanding of the student perceptions and experiences in commercialised higher education settings. Finally, the thesis provides a convincing and much needed critique of the current higher education policies by pointing out the necessity for a rounded approach to students, and the complexity and the fragility of their role in higher education.

8.1. Contributions

This section outlines key contributions of the thesis. Each contribution reflects one of the research questions presented at the end of chapter two. Due to the interrelationship between the research questions, with research question 1 being the overarching one, the order of the discussion on the contributions does not follow the order of the research questions. Instead, the first contribution addresses research question 1.1: *How do specialised media rankings shape student perceptions of their educational experience?* The following section addresses research question 1.2. *How is business school space influenced by the marketisation and commercialisation of management education? How do the features of contemporary business school space influence students and their perceptions of their educational experiences?*, and the final section explores the overarching research question *How are postgraduate students' experiences and perceptions shaped by the changing social and political conceptions of the roles and the purpose of higher education?*

8.1.1. The influence of specialised rankings on student experience

The first contribution this doctoral study makes is to the academic debates on specialised rankings in terms of their use by postgraduate management students, and the resulting influence on their student experiences. While recent studies have shown interest in the role of rankings as instruments of accountability, legitimacy and reputation for business schools (Wedlin, 2006; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Policano, 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2000), little attention has been so far given to how they are perceived and understood by the students, and what influence rankings have on their educational choices and their educational experiences (Zell, 2001; Naidoo, 2003).

Findings suggest that the student active use of rankings is largely limited to the pre-application stage, when students, particularly international ones, are faced with difficulties when identifying a suitable institution for their education. Rankings here play an important role as a user-friendly and quick way of familiarising with the expansive education market characterised by a large number of providers (Collini, 2017). At the same time, rankings act as a mechanism of endorsement of a consumerist perspective on business schools and management education. In this sense, the design and the methodologies behind rankings support students in their treatment of education as any other commodity market managed and driven by similar mechanisms, such as TripAdvisor (Jeacle & Carter, 2011; Scott & Orlikowski, 2012; Orlikowski & Scott, 2014).

While students found them useful in scoping the management education market, specialised rankings played a small role in students' final decision. This suggests the misalignment between the student expectations of their educational experiences and outcomes, and the simplified student experience as a means to financial gains, represented in specialised rankings. In other words, the student expectations are neither exclusively built on the favourable consumer experience, nor on the focus on the financial benefits of their education.

While rankings have a limited success in fulfilling their original purpose as informational tools for employers and students (Wedlin, 2006), their value for students is found in their simplicity (Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012) and the finality of their results. Rankings are no longer seen as credible sources of information, but as tools for justification and managing self-image. Postgraduate management students, whose education is characterised by high fees and little opportunities for scholarships, use rankings as easy to digest

information of the worth of their degree to their funders (most notably, family) at the beginning, and to the potential employers towards the end of their education.

The influence of rankings over employers, however, is not as powerful, particularly in the overseas employment markets. This, coupled with the increased pressures towards repatriation after graduation led by the changes in the UK immigration policies, suggests the misalignment between the key purpose of rankings as indicators of students' worth for potential employers, and the reality in which such benefits significantly differ in different markets. More importantly, the failure of rankings to deliver on the promised is reflected in student accounts as the failure of the business school to deliver on the promised outcomes. In other words, while rankings are designed and used to hold business schools accountable for their activities, business schools are also held accountable for the failure of rankings.

Finally, the value of rankings for students is also reflected in their use of ranking as a measure of their professional and intellectual value. In this sense, student use of rankings bears similarities with the organisational perspective of rankings as tools for image management (Policano, 2007; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Alvesson, 2013). This was particularly reflected in the anxiety the students felt as their programme's ranking decreased and was, consequentially, removed from the Financial Times ranking. Such use of rankings is common among most students regardless of their previous uses, experiences, and opinion on rankings. Such response suggests the existence of a potentially important unintended consequence of league tables in the context of student experience, in which the student presentation of their educated self follows the principle of commodification of their professional worth with regards to a specific number on the league table.

8.1.2. The importance of organisational spaces for educational experience

The second contribution this doctoral study makes is to the understanding of business schools' organisational space as a part of its hidden curriculum (Martin, 1976; Apple, 1971; Eisner, 1985), and its influences on student perceptions of their educational experiences. It contributes to a growing management education literature on the implicit and informal elements of student experience in business schools (Caza & Brower, 2015; Blasco, 2015) by theorising business school space as an active factor in student conceptualisation of their education and their experience, in relation to both learning and socialisation.

Findings suggest that the institutional efforts to nurture environments that cater to the needs of the management students as consumers of education result in spatial designs and practices that reflect corporate-like values of professionalism, functionality, corporate symbolism and wealth. Such features of the spatial design differentiate the business schools from the university context, and support the position of business schools at the forefront of changes in higher education (Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016). In this sense, the functionality and the professionalism reflected in the organisational space supports the student experience as an enjoyable one (Scott, 2014) for the paying customers, while at the same time downplaying the difficult aspect of educational experience. Reflecting back on the increasing importance of specialised rankings in business school strategic choices (Corley & Gioia, 2000; Wedlin, 2006), the features and the wealth represented in the organisational spaces in business schools (Policano, 2005) anticipate a favourable post-experience feedback from student-consumers.

The outcomes of this thesis also contribute to the understanding of how the commercialisation of business school spatial designs and practices aim to standardise the student experience and education from an inherently messy process of exploration and reflection (Carr & Kemmis, 2004) towards a linear, outcome-oriented (Willmott, 1995; Bell, 2004) process of acculturation to the world of employment. This goal is reflected in the predefined inflexibility of the business school space characterised by visible (hierarchy) and invisible (power relations) boundaries that confine students to their dedicated spaces. Such designs and the values they represent, therefore, discourage the active ownership of space by the students that would conflict with the standardised, outcome-oriented nature of the postgraduate education.

Consequently, findings suggest that the business school spaces, while praised for their functionality and cleanliness, were perceived as uninviting and cold, and associated with the workplace, or a commercial space. Following the student accounts on their discomfort while in the business school, and their reluctance to spend more time than needed in it, the designs and features of contemporary business school space seem to depart from its role as a space of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), towards its commercial role as a predefined and inflexible place of service and employment, characterised by a passive and impersonal interaction with its inhabitants.

The exploration of student experiences in the context of business school space presented in this thesis has significant implications for business schools and other institutions that follow, or aim to follow the commercial principles of design and utilisation of organisational space. The study provides an important insight into the importance of organisational space in student life, particularly as a reflection of the values underlying the institution and its

practices, as well as the institutional perspectives and the treatment of students.

8.1.3. The multiplicity of student experiences

The third contribution this thesis makes is to the academic debates surrounding the student experience in the context of marketisation and commercialisation of higher education. The starting point for the exploration of student experience in this doctoral thesis was to question the dominant, market-driven perspective on student experience (Scott, 2014) as a *post-hoc* evaluation of whether the education resulted with desirable outcomes such as employability (Greenbank, Hepworth & Mercer, 2009; Baden, 2013), or personal satisfaction with the quality of the process (Brookes, 2003; Douglas, McClelland & Davies, 2008). Building on the critical education theory perspective of student experience (Fleming & Monteagudo, 2014), student experience is seen as a fundamental feature of the educational process (Dewey, 2004; Freire, 2005).

Following such a perspective of student experience, the conducted empirical study exposed the existence of multiple student experiences that factor in their overall experience of the educational process. Building on Dewey (2004), learning and consumer experiences, while grounded in different approaches and values, are theorised as indivisible elements of the student educational experience. While the existence of different student experiences has been discussed and theorised before, namely the learning experience (e.g. Kolb & Kolb, 2009) and the consumer experience (e.g. Woodall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014), this thesis contributes to these discussions by exploring the connections between them.

Findings suggest that these sets of experiences are at times in unison, at times conflicted, and at times merely existing parallel one to another. The consumer experience, championed by contemporary business schools in their approach to potential customers (Alvesson, 2013) and recent public policies (Browne, 2010; Johnson, 2016), maintains a dominant position among students particularly in the pre-application stage, and in early stages of the programme. The consumer experience is reflected in the differentiation from the university, in the wealth and corporate symbolism reflected in the business school spaces, and in the high levels of access to support and information. It reflects the student expectations of value-for-money education that results in a financially valuable degree (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). In Barnett's (2007: 39) words, education from this perspective is "a transition from a mode of being for one kind of life to a mode of being for another specific kind of life" in which the student perception and expectations of learning remain very much limited to what Freire (2005) calls the banking model of education.

The student expectations related to consumer experience (i.e. prescribed, relevant, excellent, not too difficult, and enjoyable service) are, therefore, in a fundamental conflict with the nature of education as a transformative and challenging process yielding benefits that are sometimes not immediately evident (Barnett, 2015). The attempts to resolve this conflict are found in business schools' attempts to provide the best of both experiences to students by emulating the professional world. This way, the expectations of consumer-students are met (at least in terms of relevance and excellence), while the learning aspect is maintained. Such practices comprise the inclusion of the 'real world' issues and practices in the curriculum, the corporate designs of physical spaces, addition of professional support services, and the maintenance of the professional atmosphere found in most contemporary

business schools. In TTBS, such practices, which imply the indivisibility between learning and work, resulted with the emergence of a set of workplace experiences reflected in student routines, language, and treatment of TTBS as a workplace environment. Moreover, students tended to view their educational experience as a professional one, and separate it from their personal lives. This resulted in student accounts of their alienation from their learning environment, and the frustration with the lack of learning for the sake of learning.

To summarise, this thesis argues against the dominant social and political conception of students as consumers of commodified educational products supported by the market devices such as specialised media rankings, and the institutional treatment of students as customers, represented in the design of business school spaces, and its socio-material practices. Instead, it suggests that the overall students' educational experience features multiple sets of experiences that are in constant flux, and change over time as students undergo the transformative educational process. The practical implications of this argument are discussed in the following section.

8.2. Practical implications of the study

This thesis provides several important practical contributions to business schools and universities, as well as policy makers. Broadly, the richness of data and the breadth of insights into student perceptions of their experiences suggests the value of in-depth empirical research with students as key participants. For the same reasons, the thesis advocates for the proactive organisational engagement with students in an effort to better understand their perceptions and experiences in business school settings.

In terms of practical implications for individual higher education institutions, the study provides important insights into the complexities of student interaction with their educational settings. The increasingly dominant treatment of education as a commodity traded on the free market, and the substantial changes in institutional behaviours provokes important questions with regards to their implications for students and their experiences. With business schools (and increasingly universities) focusing on external sources of legitimacy and reputation such as rankings, the organisational awareness should be raised with regards to the ways students engage with them, as well as with regards to the intended and the unintended consequences they might have. Considering the organisational responsibility of the failure of rankings presented in the previous section, as well as their influence of students' commodification of professional and intellectual self-worth, institutions should take a proactive role in managing student expectations before and throughout their educational process.

Further implications of the findings of this thesis for business schools and universities are related to the emphasis on the importance of designs and uses of organisational spaces as active elements of the hidden curriculum. With student experiences being necessarily situated within their physical, social and cultural settings, the symbolism and values represented in organisational space are important factors in the formation of student experience. In this sense, the features of corporate designs of business school spaces such as clear hierarchical separations and workplace designs become embedded in the student educational experiences that potentially result with student experiences that provide little in terms of educational value.

Perhaps the broadest and the most important implication of this study is made with regards to the importance of focusing on students as central stakeholders

in higher education. Its findings emphasise the importance of processual approach to the student educational experience. More specifically, institutions need to place their focus on the entire learning journey, which assumes the recognition of the complexities and fluidity of student expectations and conceptualisations of their education and their experiences. While the thesis provides an important first insight into the complexity of these expectations and experiences, it is up to individual business schools and universities to see beyond the customer-service provider relationship with students, and to assure that their students are indeed placed in the heart of their practices throughout the educational process.

This thesis also provides some important recommendations for policy makers. The study suggests that the dominance of the consumerist treatment of students in UK higher education policies does not capture the full breadth of complexities and tensions between different sets of student experiences that emerge during the educational process. While the care for student benefit seems to be central to most higher education policy documents in recent years, this thesis suggests the existence of multiple approaches to students and their educational experiences which are absent from the public policy.

8.3. Limitations of the study and areas of future research

In this section, the key limitations of the thesis and areas for future research are discussed. First, the challenges related to the methodological approach are discussed, outlining the issues with confidentiality, and the narrow focus of the empirical study on one student cohort. Next, the section discusses the limited inclusion of other business school members, most notably academic and support staff, in the empirical study.

8.3.1. Limitations of the study

The exploratory approach to the study proved to be important for uncovering new insights into student perceptions and experiences in the business school. At the same time, the approach was confronted with significant challenges throughout the data collection and analysis processes. As outlined in the Methodology chapter, key challenges included issues with gaining access to TTBS and the students, and with the resulting issues of confidentiality. While access was gained, confidentiality provided a significant limitation particularly in the context of reporting on the features of business school spaces and student interactions with space.

The in-depth, exploratory approach to the empirical research uncovered valuable and at times unexpected features of student experiences. At the same time, it also required a narrow empirical focus of investigation focused on one cohort of postgraduate management students. While other approaches were considered, most notably including larger number of students in the interview schedule, doing more group interviews, and including students from other programmes and schools within the university, the focus on a smaller cohort proved to be a successful approach for investigating student perceptions, behaviours and interactions.

By focusing on one cohort in one business school, it was possible to utilise multiple methods of data collection. Moreover, the participants all shared the same curriculum, teachers, physical and social settings. They shared the same deadlines and concerns related to them, and have experienced similar organisational dynamics. The similar context of their experiences, personal and group dynamics, reactions, concerns, etc., has enabled the comparison

between student accounts, thus allowing the study to focus on shared experiences, opinions and views.

Another limitation of the study relates to the lack of the voice of other, non-student organisational members in the interview process. While the views of academic and support staff are represented in observational data, they were not a part of the interview process due to the clear focus of the research on students and their experiences. Furthermore, interviewing academic staff could also be potentially harmful for the already fragile rapport with students, particularly with regards to their openness and sincerity when discussing more sensitive topics.

It is also important to reflect on the limitations arising from focusing the empirical study on specialised rankings and business space as two distinctive aspects that shape student experiences. While such focus remains central to the arguments presented in this thesis, the discussion of the limitations of the study necessitates the reflection on other relevant contexts and features that remain unexplored. These, among others, include the theorisations related to the implications of the formal curriculum on student experience, and the empirical exploration of spaces other than the business school, that may have an impact on shaping student experiences of management education.

Formal, explicit curriculum remains central to the student pedagogical experience in the business school context, and this study acknowledges and builds on the existing body of literature discussing this topic (e.g. Rynes & Trank, 2014; Thomas, Thomas & Wilson, 2013; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004; Ghoshal, 2005). However, the approach to higher education as a transformative and transitional process (Barnett, 2007; 2014; Freire, 2005) reflected in individual experiences (Dewey, 1997; Kolb & Kolb, 2009) required the conceptual expansion of the empirical inquiry beyond the formal curriculum. Instead, the

interest was placed on less visible aspects with a more implicit influence on student experience, that emerge not only from the educational, but also from the social and political environments in which education takes place. At the same time, it was important to make sure that the study remains within the feasibility boundaries. Since the empirical exploration of the relationship between spatiality and student experience remains firmly situated within the business school physical space, the implications of other spaces – institutional, public, virtual – are not captured or represented in this thesis.

Finally, the lack of a more comprehensive analysis of the link between the student socio-cultural backgrounds, gender and race, and their experiences is an important limitation. Unfortunately, such investigation would expand the already broad scope of the study beyond what is feasible for a doctoral research.

8.3.2. Areas of future research

In line with other exploratory studies, this research uncovered multiple potential avenues for future research. Considering the significant lack of studies of this type in management education, the findings, recommendations and contributions of this study provide an important first step towards a better understanding of the changing roles and purposes of higher education from the perspective of students and their experiences.

In light of the identified limitations of the research, and building on the contributions of this thesis, future research in this topic could usefully expand the scope of empirical investigation in several directions. First, the empirical research could be expanded to include multiple student cohorts enrolled on similar programmes in different business schools. This could provide

important insights into differences between student experiences in different educational contexts. For similar reasons, future studies could include undergraduate programmes, as well as other schools within the university.

Such expansion of the research scope would provide additional insights into whether the student perceptions and the identified sets of experiences dominating among students in TTBS are reflected among students in other institutional settings. Moreover, the findings of the empirical research presented in this thesis provide a suitable starting point for a more focused exploration of the student perceptions of education and their experiences, as well as their perceptions and relationship with specialised media rankings and organisational spaces. Such exploration could potentially utilise other research methods that would be suitable for reaching a larger selection of participants.

Another important area for further research is the exploration of student experiences and perceptions of education in the context of their socio-cultural backgrounds, gender and ethnicity. This is particularly important due to the international composition of postgraduate management students in UK business schools, and the significant differences between prior student experiences within different educational systems worldwide. This research touches upon and uncovers a variety of approaches and perspectives on the use of ranking devices in higher education. With the findings insinuating the existence of multiple approaches to rankings in different parts of the World, and by different stakeholders (students, funders, employers), further research is required to explore these differences.

An important area for future research is the study of the relations between the changing socio-political environment, the institutional practices, and students and their experiences from the perspective of student identity (Goffman, 1956; Alvesson, 2010; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). This

thesis provides an important starting point for such exploration as it details the emergence of multiple student experiences and their fluidity over time. Furthermore, future studies could build on this thesis to explore the power relations in higher education institutions, particularly in the context of increasingly consumerist perspectives on education held by students and institutions alike (Baranowski & Weir, 2010; Paechter, 2004; Fahy, Easterby-Smith & Lervik, 2013).

8.4. Concluding remarks

The purpose of the final chapter was to summarise and reflect on the aims and objectives of the study, and its design. It has detailed the theoretical and empirical contributions of the study, discussed its practical implications and limitations, and laid out potential areas of future research. By expanding the scope of the investigation to students, the study has explored their perceptions and experiences in contemporary UK higher education. By providing insights into student relationships and perspectives on specialised rankings, it suggested their active role as tools for justification and measurement of professional and intellectual value, thus suggesting an implicit, but powerful influence on student education and experience.

Furthermore, the study added to management education literature by theorising business school space as an active and influential factor in student conceptualisation of education and their experience. It also suggested its active role in mediating market values through corporate designs and features of space. In the light of these perceptions, the study argues the importance of regarding students as individuals in the process of transformation as well as in the process of transition, and their educational experiences as complex, multi-layered and fluid.

However, as noted throughout the thesis, the intention was not only to advance theoretical and empirical understanding of the implications of commercialisation and marketisation on students and their experiences. The thesis opened with a quote from Stefan Collini, in which he notes the disorientation emerging from the fundamental changes occurring in higher education over the past several decades, raising the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the roles and the purposes of higher education in contemporary society that go beyond its current conceptualisations.

This thesis contributed to these discussions by emphasising the importance of a comprehensive approach to higher education that actively considers students as central stakeholders. In this sense, the thesis problematised the simplistic perspectives on students as consumers of the commodified educational product, and their experience as a *post-hoc* evaluation of educational services. Instead, it provided a comprehensive approach to exploring student educational experience as a multi-layered and dynamic process. While these conclusions on their own may make a small contribution to the fundamental discussions on roles and purposes of higher education, they nevertheless mark an important step in the right direction.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UK postgraduate education tuition fees – comparison between MSc Management and Education

		MSc Management, or equivalent		MSc/MA Education, or equivalent	
		UK/EU	International	UK/EU	International
1.	University of Cambridge	£25,770	£25,770	10,800	23,400
2.	University of Oxford	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
3.	University College London	£25,890	£25,890	£7,925	£17,190
4.	Imperial College London	£27,000	£27,000	n/a	n/a
5.	University of Edinburgh	£16,700	£21,000	£9,500	£19,300
6.	King's College London	£10,950	£25,950	n/a	n/a
7.	University of Manchester	£13,000	£21,500	£9,000	£17,000
8.	London School of Economics	£28,944	£28,944	n/a	n/a
9.	University of Bristol	£11,600	£21,400	£6,400	£15,700
10.	University of Warwick	£27,250	£27,250	£8,170	£16,910
11.	University of Glasgow	£10,200	£19,500	£7,250	£17,250
12.	Durham University	£13,000	£19,000	£7,400	£16,500
13.	University of Nottingham	£11,475	£18,945	£6,930	£15,885
14.	University of St Andrews	£9,870	£20,370	n/a	n/a
15.	University of Birmingham	£10,710	£19,890	£7,020	£15,660
16.	University of Sheffield	£10,970	£20,470	£6,500	£16,000
17.	University of Southampton	£12,400	£19,400	£9,000	£16,710
18.	University of Leeds	£10,000	£19,000	£6,750	£15,750
19.	Queen Mary University of London	£11,450	£17,800	n/a	n/a
20.	University of York	£8,790	£19,550	£6,760	£16,290
	AVERAGE	£15,577	£22,033	£7,815	£17,110

Sources: The list of universities is based on QS 2016-2017 rankings of UK universities, available on: <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2016>. Accessed on 01/04/2017. Tuition fees data compiled from entries on each university website.

APPENDIX B: Major investments in UK business school facilities

Business School	Type of investment	Year of refurbishment	Cost	Source
London Business School	Refurbishment	2017	£60m	https://www.ft.com/content/94f7132c-3a1b-11e2-a00d-00144feabdc0
Imperial College Business School	New Building	2004	£27m	https://wwwf.imperial.ac.uk/business-school/about-us/history/
Warwick Business School	Extension	Ongoing	£30m	https://www.wbs.ac.uk/news/first-phase-of-30-million-extension-finished/
Cass Business School	New building	2002	£42m	https://www.bennettsassociates.com/projects/cass-business-school/ ; http://www.cass.city.ac.uk/cass-at-fifty/milestones
University of Edinburgh Business School	Extension & Refurbishment	2010	£17m	http://www.ed.ac.uk/estates/about/completed-projects/adam-ferguson-building
Durham Business School	Extension & Refurbishment	2013	£16.6m	https://www.dur.ac.uk/news/newsitem/?itemno=15797
Strathclyde Business School	Extension	2015	£23m	http://www.strath.ac.uk/estates/information/estatestrategy/#d.en.225040
Leeds Business School	Refurbishment & Expansion	1999; expansion expected until 2020	n/a	http://business.leeds.ac.uk/about-us/our-history/
Lancaster University Management School	Redevelopment	2019 (expected)	£40m	http://www.constructionenquirer.com/2016/03/30/lancaster-uni-plans-40m-management-school-revamp/ ; https://www.e-architect.co.uk/england/lancaster-university-management-school
Bradford School of Management	New building	2010	n/a	http://www.brad.ac.uk/management/about-the-school/history/
Alliance Manchester Business School	Redevelopment	2018 (expected)	£50m	https://www.mbs.ac.uk/news/archive/school-news/plans-submitted-for-retail-and-leisure-phase-of-50-million-redevelopment-of-mbs/

Business School	Type of investment	Year of refurbishment	Cost	Source
Exeter Business School	Expansion	2015	£25m	https://business-school.exeter.ac.uk/about/facilities/ ; http://business-school.exeter.ac.uk/news/newsarchive2009/title_52044_en.html
Bath School of Management	New building	planned	£39m	https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/bath-university-seeks-architect-for-management-school/10016297.article
Adam Smith Business School	Refurbishment & Expansion	planned	£18m	http://www.gla.ac.uk/about/campus/gilbertscott/
Henley Business School	New building	2009	£12.5m	http://www.bdp.com/en/projects/f-l/Henley-Business-School-University-of-Reading/

Sources: The list of UK business schools is based on 2016 Financial Times MSc Management rankings, available on: <http://rankings.ft.com/businessschoolrankings/masters-in-management-2016>. Accessed on 23/05/2017. Investment data compiled from the stated sources and personal communication.

APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet

An investigation into the PGT students' perspective of their student experience

Information sheet for study interviewees

1. About the project

This doctoral research investigates the dual role of business schools in terms of both educating and preparing students for their future careers. Centrally, the research investigates the student perspective of their experience in the business school, and how a top-tier, highly ranked business school and program is involved in graduates' development, future career choices and identification.

2. What is involved

During this interview we will talk about your experiences before and during your involvement on the MSc programme at the Business School, and your future plans.

You will be interviewed by **Jakov Jandric**. The gathered information will be used as a part of my doctoral thesis under supervision of **Professor Wendy Loretto**. The results of the study may be used for scientific publications, in public presentations to non-scientific groups, and on television and other media.

I do not anticipate that any of the questions will cause difficulty or distress, but if there is something you do not wish to answer, please let me know.

While the research is not focused on individual responses, anonymized quotes may be used in the final thesis write-up and other written and verbal presentations to academic and non-academic audiences.

Your identity will remain ANONYMOUS. Your interview will be given a code; when any of your answers is used, they will be identified only by this code. I will ensure that no details which could identify you as a specific individual are reported. Audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the PhD programme.

3. Contact details

If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

Doctoral researcher: Jakov Jandric

Email: Jakov.Jandric@ed.ac.uk

Office 2.02., University of Edinburgh Business School, 29 Buccleuch place,
Edinburgh, EH8 9JS

Supervisor: Professor Wendy Loretto

Email: Wendy.Loretto@ed.ac.uk

Office 2.11., University of Edinburgh Business School, 29 Buccleuch place,
Edinburgh, EH8 9JS

Phone: +44 (0)131 650 4102

APPENDIX D: An example of the Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

11/6/2015

P18

Introduction

Welcome

Reading information sheet, signing the informed consent

Recording

Refreshments available, toilets available

Pre-application, application and initial thoughts

1. What are the (academic and personal) reasons behind your decision to choose this particular MSc programme? Previous experiences in other schools?
2. What are the reasons behind your decision to enrol to UoE and to this particular school?
3. How do you perceive yourself (role/function) in the school? What do you expect from school?
4. In your view, what is/are the school's role(s) or function(s)?
5. What were your expectations from the programme and the school before you arrived and at the very beginning of the studies?
 - Mop-up question: What studying means to you?

On-course

1. What elements of your studies here you find good / bad / unique / interesting?
2. What are your views on the school in terms of the facilities and resources?

3. How do you perceive your academic experience (academic and other staff)?
4. How do you perceive the social side of your student experience? (age, gender, ethnicity)

After-schooling

5. Have you thought of your next steps after the graduation?
 - a. Where do you see yourself immediately after the graduation?
 - b. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

Finishing interview

Have we missed anything?

Thank you for participating

Feedback on the interview process and questions

- ***If rankings are mentioned, the following questions ought to be asked:***

- Which rankings were included in your decision?
- Why did you involve rankings in your decision? What is the added value?
- In retrospective, were rankings a useful tool in your decision making?
- How do you identify yourself – a member of business school, or of the Uni? Why?